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# Representations and belonging: a brief study of the social contexts of museums in Samoa and Fiji

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# Representations and Belonging: A Brief Study of the Social Contexts of Museums in Samoa and Fiji

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To my teachers. *Vinaka vaka levu and Fa'afetai lava.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Museums are institutions predicated upon multivocality – they collect and interpret objects, human remains, and non-human remains for a multitude of publics. Museums at once impart the frameworks for understanding one's surroundings, for understanding history, for understanding the organization of the world and create these understandings. Just like any other institution, they are fluid, subject to the conflicting wills of their creators and users, ebbs and flows of funding and staffing, and the desires of visitors. The history of museums is deeply intertwined with the histories of art, monuments and memorials, and economic globalization.

The history of museums begins in the private homes of nobles: individuals assembling *wunderkammer*, cabinets of curiosity, plucking objects from their original contexts at their own discretions. Their arrangements in these cabinets did not often follow patterns of classification or chronological narratives that dominate contemporary exhibit organizations. Museums are understood to have changed their physical forms and missions as time has passed. However, museums are not monolithic: just like any other institution, are fluid, subject to the conflicting wills of their creators and users, ebbs and flows of funding and staffing, and the desires of visitors.

Museums are important conduits into studies of national belonging due to the representational and institutional power imparted to them by governmental and

non-governmental organizations. These questions about national belonging are played out, sometimes answered -and often contested- through the presences and absences of different objects and narratives. Museums are entrusted with the care and dissemination of multifarious narratives and images. These narratives and images have such power that they attract people from foreign lands. Cultural heritage is a powerful draw for tourists and for locals alike.

The criticisms of museums are often criticisms of the ways in which they represent and the things they represent. Museums are at once venerated and criticized for their classificatory and visual organization methods that privilege 'Western', empirical science over non-Western methods of presentation and organization.

In Samoa and Fiji, the history of museums is bound up with the histories of colonial administrations and infrastructures. This is not to say, however, that museums are not subject to local desires and wills. In fact, museums are sites of contest, acculturation, and deployments of individual and group agency.

What I would like to communicate in this thesis is how the presences and absences of certain objects, methods of spatial organization, and historical narratives in certain museums demonstrate ways in which questions of representation articulate with questions of belonging. How, then, do questions of belonging and by extension, representation, fit into histories and discourses about museums in Fiji and Samoa? To answer these questions, we must examine why these questions are being asked, who is asking (or contesting) them, and why they

are being asked. These questions of belonging are not unique to postcolonial societies. Rather, they have existed since the dawn of civilization, but the questioners and the answers have changed over time. With the advent of colonialism and imperialism and the persistence of these practices throughout history, actors on all sides have altered conceptions of belonging and attachments to places, cultures, and even one's own family.

Personal Anecdote: Fiji

A warm and sunny day in Suva began with a visit to the Fiji Museum. Luxurious foliage canopied the grounds, and winding sidewalks loop through the grass to connect the Museum to associated buildings. Our group walked towards the main entrance. To our left, a road traveled up a hill towards the Museum's offices and library. To our right were sidewalks traversing the lawn. The Museum's grounds are located in the Thurston Gardens,[1] which are Fiji's national botanical gardens. What does it mean that this museum is situated in a verdant enclave, sheltered from the urban hustle-and-bustle under the cathedral of vegetation? Was this place of history and culture, a place tasked with making order out of objects and preserving the past, meant to be protected from the relentless progress urbanization and globalization engender?

We entered the museum by traversing a newly built porch, which served as a

[1] Suva City Council. *Thurston Gardens.* 2013. http://www.experiencesuva.com/thurston-gardens/ (accessed March 29, 2017). The Thurston Gardens' website, managed by the Suva Town Council, features two very interesting historical notes. The site first mentions that the gardens features vegetation indigenous to Fiji and vegetation European settlers introduced. The second historical note describes how the gardens' grounds were a site of mass slaughter and cannibalism.

café and a performance space, and gathering place. Upon entering the Museum, we came into a large exhibition hall. In the center of the hall is a large voyaging canoe mounted on a platform. Surrounding it were cases containing a multitude of images and objects. Across the room from the canoe were the remains of the HMS Bounty's rudder. The HMS Bounty was a ship upon which a famous mutiny occurred. The mutineers' descendants live in the Pitcairn Islands, in the Eastern Pacific. The canoe, proudly mounted in the center of the room, seemed ready to take to the high seas. I wondered how the Fiji Museum represented the ways in which that canoe was used. Would the museum display a *bure*, a traditional grass house? Perhaps farming implements used by Indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian alike? The personal effects of Girmityas? I wondered as I ambled through the cool, winding halls.

What I saw pleasantly surprised me. As I wandered through the display-lined hallways, I saw a multitude of stories unfold: I saw finds from archaeological expeditions to the Sigatoka sand dunes, Indo-Fijian wall hangings depicting a scene from the Ramayana, wedding dresses made from Masi, Fijian bark cloth, cannibal forks, and countless other objects. The diversity of objects was amazing, and I really got the sense that the Fiji Museum was attempting to weave a multiplicity of cultural and historical threads into the tapestry that is Fiji.

Personal Anecdote: Samoa

I happened upon the Museum of Samoa completely by accident. My program director's favorite way of orienting us to Apia was by dropping individuals off and

having them navigate to a meeting point by a specific time. I stepped out of the van and into the piercing equatorial sun. I had been in the country for about a day. The breeze languidly stirred the air, heavy with humidity, and I embarked towards a landmark that caught my eye during our drive through Apia. During our initial drive through Apia, I had spotted the Museum of Samoa as we drove past. The wall that faced Vaitele street, which runs parallel to the seashore, was decorated with a large breaching whale and *va'a*, Samoan voyaging canoes. The side facing Ififi street, which runs perpendicular to Vaitele street, continues the sea mural but featured another *va'a* and sea life. When I made my first visit, I walked up a steep gravel driveway from the road to the Museum. The Museum shared a parking lot with a language school, and shared grounds with a primary school and the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture, MESC.

When the Museum is open, the first exhibit halls can be entered through doors that open to the parking lot. On this level is the staircase that conveys visitors to the top floor, where two more exhibition halls and the Museum's offices are located. There was something about the place that immediately intrigued me. The staircase, lined with archival photographs and explanatory labels, caused me to think about the ways in which colonial authorities and elites potentially used photography in Samoa, and how it is possibly used today. That, I thought to myself as I put away my notebook, is for a future doctoral dissertation. When I entered the top floor, a staff member greeted me in English, telling me about the exhibitions' content and where everything was. I introduced myself and told her I was an

American university student interested in studying the Museum's history and current situations. After agreeing to meet with me another time, we said our goodbyes and I explored the top two floors.

The top floor's exhibit immediately caught my attention. Upon the walls were exhibit labels and informational placards written in Samoan and English. The signs next to the doors in each room informed readers that the exhibit material was from the Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira.

This thesis is based on fieldwork I undertook during my study abroad program. In the Fall of 2015, I attended SIT Study Abroad's Samoa: Pacific Communities and Social Change program[2]. The program included intensive instruction in the Samoan language and Samoan history and culture. The program was based at the University of the South Pacific-Alafua, a branch of the University of the South Pacific (USP) located on the outskirts of Samoa's capital, Apia. This campus' primary focus is agricultural training, attracting students from 12 Pacific Island nations and territories. While there, I also conducted an independent research project inspired this senior thesis[3].

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[2] See http://studyabroad.sit.edu/programs/semester/spring-2017/wsr/

[3] Elizabeth Bennett, "Challenges to Cultural Heritage Preservation and Management at the

The study concerned the challenges that the Museum of Samoa (*Falemata'aga*) faces in its efforts to preserve and interpret Samoan cultural heritage. I discussed these efforts to preserve both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible cultural heritage pertains to physical manifestations of cultural practices and ideas, such as art objects, tools, buildings, and more. Intangible cultural heritage is non-physical manifestations of cultural practices and ideas, which are generally passed down orally. These include genealogies, dances, oral histories, religious practices, and more[4]. My previous research focused on Samoa. The thesis moves into broader, comparative questions.

By locating and articulating questions of belonging and museums within Fiji and Samoa's unique histories and cultural contexts, I hope to answer the following questions: The main question I am investigating in this thesis is: how do museums and the cultural heritage they are associated with articulate with different notions of belonging in Fiji and Samoa? In other words, what are the museums' functions in regards to discussions of different historical and cultural narratives? What are the institutional structures and histories that engender certain challenges and successes? How has involvement in transnational legal and economic organizations such as the United Nations and its associated organs, including UNESCO and economic development organs, changed how these museums operate and how they understand themselves?

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Falemata'aga, the Museum of Samoa" (SIT Study Abroad, 2015), http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3251&context=isp_collection.

[4] United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, "What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?" unesco.org. http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003 (Accessed 5 March 2017).

I would also like to state that this work does not aim to evaluate whether museums are beneficial or detrimental. Not only is it beyond my intellectual and moral place to cast moral judgments, but moral judgments obfuscate the discussion of different cultural practices and historical circumstances that determine certain aspects of museums' histories and functions. This work is not meant to be an indictment or endorsement of the institutions discussed, but a brief study of selected cases.

Defining 'belonging'

As I stated previously, I am acknowledging that questions about belonging are distilled into questions about national belonging. This is because the project of nation building through economic and institutional development has brought to light controversies about the nature of belonging. For the purposes of this thesis, I will define belonging as the process and sentiment of relating to a community or a representation of it. Bringing about feelings of belonging requires an understanding of a community's or a collection of communities' histories, cultures, and contemporary situation. Representational institutions such as museums, tasked with teaching, must differentiate between those who cannot relate to material displayed in exhibitions and those who can.

Following Bennett's logic, museums are fundamentally classificatory and ordering institutions. Regarding questions of belonging, museums use objects and narratives to educate, to encourage learning by having information appeal to the

visitor on some level. If a visitor can identify with how or what kind of information is presented, then they will learn. The same is true with engendering feelings of belonging: if a visitor's ideas about their own heritage relate to the displayed and discussed materials, then they will experience feelings of belonging.

## On the Study of Museums

This work focuses on museums for several reasons. The first reason is that museums are used and understood as repositories for objects and stories associated with the past. But which of the many pasts are displayed in this manner? Who is trying to teach what to which kind of people? Whose voice speaks to museumgoers? Which objects are left to languish in the institutional subconscious of collections storage? The answers to these questions can be found in the museum's funding, parent organization, collections, and collection documents. For the purposes of this paper, I will attempt to understand how answering these questions can elucidate the social contexts of museums in Fiji and Samoa, how sociopolitical histories influence the roles that museums play in those nations. I will examine the social contexts of museums through two ways of understanding what museums do and discuss: I will discuss the roles museums play in discourses of national belonging and the roles museums have and potentially will play in discourses surrounding colonial institutions and indigenous knowledges, cultures, and histories.

My argument is predicated upon understandings of museum theories and histories. Museums are more than repositories for tangible culture: they shape the

ways by which people understand places, histories, and what it means to associate oneself with a certain place or group. As ostensibly educational institutions at the intersection of art, history, ethnology, and science, museums are revered for the ways in which they make sense of the world, as instruments of taxonomy and classification. Museums use their institutional power, which is predicated upon state funding, state staffing, and incorporation into government institutions, to replicate certain ways of viewing the world, its peoples, and its events.

Museums have changed extensively since the first institutions opened their doors. Museums now serve a multitude of publics. In addition to serving a general public of many social strata, museums serve the governments of the countries in which they are based. Museums are not only educational institutions, but also tourist institutions. Sustainable development in postcolonial states is a major concern for international organizations. These concerns about sustainability are predicated upon developing countries' susceptibility to the effects of climate change, fears that these countries may not develop economic solvency that would lead to self-sufficiency, and most importantly, fears that their formerly dominated cultures will be annihilated or assimilated into a hegemonic post-colonial culture influenced by Western nations.

Questions about belonging are, in this context, often defined as questions of national belonging. This is because the process of decolonization and development is predicated upon creating a nation-state. Nation-states are the means by which people who identify with a certain place, either through birth or relocation may

interact with global economic and political systems. Nation-states are expected to implement specific forms of governance, undertake development projects that raise their inhabitants' standards of living, and participate in the creation and implementation of international legislative, military, and trade agreements.

In order to do these things, the nation-state, just as museums do, create and o order out of their own public. Belonging is also a question of immigration status, international relations, and cultural affiliation. These questions are very difficult to answer in post-colonial societies, as the indigenous population has often undergone oppression that fundamentally alters their own ideas about what it means to belong.

Tony Bennett's[5] *The Exhibitionary Complex* demonstrates how museums work as institutions that control the ways in which museums are staging grounds for politics of knowledge. Bennett explains that museums are designed to impart a way of ordering and understanding the world on their visitors, and do so by standardizing the information that is disseminated and by forcing the viewers to interact with the space a certain way[6]. Basically, he is discussing how museums are designed to make visitors intake information in a very deliberate way. Sometimes, exhibits are organized chronologically, or by certain themes. Bennett continues: He says that museums act as perpetuators of societal order by supplanting their own knowledge with that which the museum disseminates. He continues:

> 'Since the late nineteenth century, [museums] have been ranked highly in the funding priorities of all developed nation-states and have proved remarkably

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[5] It should be noted that this Tony Bennett is neither the famed musician nor related to me.
[6] Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

> influential cultural technologies in the degree to which they have recruited the interest and participation of their citizenries.'[7]

Bennett thus situates the museum with the state, making museums part of the state's efforts to perpetuate certain narratives about belonging. Haidy Geismar, points out that '[Cultural] Property is an implementation of sovereignty everywhere...',[8]. This can articulate with Bennett's argument about the role of the state in museum organization and practices by stating that museums and other institutions dedicated to cultural heritage preservation and interpretation are places where sovereignty and identity articulate. Because of the roles that museums play in development and tourism, museums are often the storytellers of a place or people. They present the case for a people's culture and history.

## Authenticity

Authenticity is a controversial concept. Debates about the nature of and usefulness of authenticity as a measure of economic development and effects of globalization dominate tourism and cultural studies. Valuing authenticity, and shunning experiences not deemed 'authentic', is problematic because it implies that the changes certain practices undergo are fundamentally negative. This is bad because it implies that indigenous peoples are not allowed to adapt to the changing world. It implies that indigineity belongs in the past, not amongst the conditions of

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[7] Bennett, 129

[8] Haidy Geismar. "Culture, Property, Indigeneity," in *Treasured Possessions: Indigenous Interventions into Cultural and Indigenous Property* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

modernity.

Is it possible to decolonize museums and knowledge?

The decolonizing process is not only about building national and local infrastructures and international relationships, but about building and contesting national identities as well. As I stated previously, one of the most widely known criticisms levied at museums in post-colonial societies, or museums that exhibit art and artifacts from colonized or previously colonized peoples, is that museums perpetuate colonialist ,hierarchies of knowledge, representation, and dissemination. A principal concern of many academic circles attempting to center marginalized narratives is the concern about decolonizing disciplines. That is, critiquing or outright rejecting practices that are destructive to the well-being of indigenous peoples' worldviews. Decolonization is a healing process as well as an intellectual process.

The decolonization of museums is a controversial topic because of museums' embroilment in development projects and colonial classificatory and ordering projects. However, it is important to realize that museums can be sites of indigenous resistance and deployment of agency if they are given the institutional and financial support to do so. Decolonizing museums in a tourist context could potentially introduce tourists to, and even inspire support for, indigenous worldviews and practices. If museums and the knowledge they disseminate are to be decolonized, however, it is not up to multinational organizations or former colonial states to

decide how it is done: it should be up to the inhabitants of post-colonial societies to determine how this is to be done.

**CHAPTER ONE**: Global Institutions and Cultural Heritage in Context

The Pacific Islands are, and have been, avidly studied. Some of the most famous early anthropological works published (See Malinowski, 1922, Mead, 1928, Buck/Te Rangi Hīroa, 1954) were based on studies of Pacific peoples. Teresia Teaiwa summarizes the history of Pacific studies' articulations with social science quite nicely here:

> 'Once upon a time studying the Pacific was a noble career and widely recognized for its contributions to the advancement of human knowledge...But somewhere along the way, the dialogue between studies of the Pacific and studies of humanity have broken down, so that those of us in Pacific studies who want to have dialogues across geo-cultural regions are faced with such an enormous level of ignorance that we are sometimes forced to draw analogies and make comparisons that we think will help attract critical attention to the Pacific.'[9]

Teaiwa implies that this 'ignorance' extends beyond the academic disciplines and into the everyday. Despite the ways in which Pacific knowledges, and those who have disseminated them through the social science canons, have impacted understandings of human social life, something has happened to divorce that body of knowledge from everyday and academic discourses.

This disconnect is important to talk about in the contexts of museum and cultural heritage tourism development in the Pacific because these institutions must

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[9] Teresia K Teaiwa, "On Analogies: Rethinking the Pacific in a Global Context," *The Contemporary Pacific* 18, no. 1 (2006): 71–87.

grapple with the dual existence of vast bodies of indigenous knowledge that has shaped, and been shaped by, European knowledges, and the stereotypes and other preconceived notions of Pacific cultures and histories. Museums and other cultural heritage institutions must at once celebrate the indigenous knowledges and foster understandings of them while correcting potentially harmful misconceptions. Here is how multinational institutions have gone about doing this.

United Nations: Tourism as Development, and Museums as Tools

The United Nations classifies Fiji and Samoa as Small Island Developing States, or SIDS. They tend to experience economic and social development issues tied to colonial histories. The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, UN-OHRLLS, describes the SIDS' challenges this way:

> 'The common challenges faced by SIDS are: narrow resource base depriving them of the benefits of economies of scale, small domestic markets and heavy dependence on a few external markets and import resources; low and irregular international traffic volumes...'[10]

These economic issues compound SIDS' difficulties in adapting to the effects of climate change. The combination of environmental degradation and economic and civil infrastructure such as transportation networks can potentially endanger SIDS' economies. The UN recognizes that tourism plays a complicated role in SIDS

[10] Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), "Small Island Developing States: Small Islands Big(ger) Stakes" (Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), 2011), http://unohrlls.org/custom-content/uploads/2013/08/SIDS-Small-Islands-Bigger-Stakes.pdf.

economies: it acknowledges that, at once, tourism and its associated infrastructures can both imperil and bolster SIDS economies.

In addition to supporting environmental preservation and restoration, gender equality, and sustainable economic development, the United Nations sponsors multifarious economic and social development initiatives that profoundly influence the course of cultural heritage preservation and interpretation in the Pacific. For the purposes of this paper, I will primarily discuss initiatives and projects sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO. UNESCO works to create policies that will protect cultural heritage sites and objects of cultural patrimony. Given the colonial histories of Fiji and Samoa, and the painful dynamics between colonized peoples and their colonizers, the politics and histories surrounding both tangible and intangible cultural heritage must be navigated with the utmost sensitivity to past events and current circumstances.

This sensitivity is deployed in policymaking, and what led to UNESCO's implementation of legislation and programs that support the protection, preservation, and interpretation of intangible and tangible cultural heritage. UNESCO's role as an organ of the United Nations is to further its mission of international representation and peacekeeping.

I argue that UNESCO privileges the use of institutions such as museums because they appeal to a vast array of publics and can be used to further scientific research. In addition to their efforts to standardize museum practices through

**CHAPTER TWO**: Samoa

A Brief History of Samoa

Samoa, formerly known as Western Samoa, is an independent state located east of Fiji and north west of Tonga. Samoa, like Fiji, is deeply linked to other Pacific peoples and nations through diplomatic ties, marital ties, trade, and war. The Lapita people settled Samoa over 3,000 years ago, spurring the development of what came to be known as the Polynesian culture - one that would diffuse throughout Northern, Southern, and Eastern Oceania[12].

Samoa is a unitary parliamentary democracy, which means that the governmental authority is centralized, with local governments having less legislative or executive authority than the national government[13]. Laws are created in a parliamentary system, which is comprised of *matai*. Following 2013 legislation, women must fill 10% of parliamentary seats, or five seats[14].

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[12] Geoff Irwin. "Pacific Migrations - From West to Eat Polynesia." *Te Ara The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, February 8, 2005. http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/pacific-migrations/page-4.

[13] Jeannette L. Nolen, Darshana Das, Surabhi Sinha, Gloria Lotha, and Adam Augustyn. *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* Encyclopedia Britannia, Inc., 4 May 2015. Web. 20 Apr. 2017. https://www.britannica.com/topic/unitary-system.>

[14] Pacific Women in Politics. *Samoa.* http://www.pacwip.org/future-elections/samoa/ (accessed

Samoan society is traditionally organized by social groups called *'aiga*, or extended families. The *'aiga* leaders are called *matai*, hereditary chiefs who are categorized as *ali'i* or *tulafale*. Each *'aiga* possesses one or more chiefly titles which, in pre-Christian times, linked the *matai* to deities or famous mortal ancestors. *Ali'i*, often translated to 'high chiefs', carry the family's spiritual legitimacy, while *tulafale* often undertake practical matters at chiefly council, or *fono* meetings. Titles tie 'aiga to land and sea parcels, which provide the *'aiga* with pasture, food, and building materials. Without lands, there are no livelihoods.

Samoan cultural norms and practices are codified in the *fa'asamoa*, 'the Samoan way'. According to McMullin, *fa'asamoa* and *fa'amatai*, the chiefly system, are the institutions upon which Samoan identity is based, even after centuries of Euro-American cultural incursion and attempts at erasure[15]. McMullin implies that Samoanness, as a condition of adhering to the tenets of *fa'asamoa,* transcends 'nationhood' and 'Western institutions'[16].

European contact was sporadic until 1830, when members of the London Missionary Society[17] began proselytizing to Samoans and copra plantations became prominent. The assimilation of Christianity into Samoan culture profoundly affected the ways in which Samoans understood their cosmologies and relations to cultural

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April 25, 2017).

[15] McMullin, Dan Taulapapa, "The Passive Resistance of Samoans to U.S. and Other Colonialisms." In *Sovereignty Matters,* 109–22. Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination. University of Nebraska Press, 2005. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1dnncqc.9.

[16] Dan Taulapapa McMullin, "The Passive Resistance of Samoans to U.S. and Other Colonialisms." In *Sovereignty Matters,* 109–22. Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination. University of Nebraska Press, 2005

[17] Henceforth LMS.

practices and heritage. One of the first and most salient examples of these changes is the written alphabet. Over time, the missionaries created a Samoan orthography so that they could print the bible and enable its transmission to future generations. The preservation of selective narratives ironically drained the pool of knowledge sustained by oral tradition. Oral tradition is the means by which claims to land and chiefly titles are made, perpetuated, and modified over time. The fluid nature of oral history and intangible culture allows for individual and group agency to shape the culture as it sees fit.

In 1830 and 1832 a missionary recorded Samoan oral histories, and Meleisea argues that this marked the beginning of modern Samoan history[18]. Thus, 'modern history' is conflated with the introduction of written Samoan histories. In addition to this, missionaries emphasized the influx of new and beneficial material goods to converts[19]. Samoans' relationship with Christianity was not only mediated through European missionaries, but Tongan missionaries and the fulfillment of an old prophecy. According to Robson, a group of Tongans, who had been adopting Wesleyan Christianity, had managed to convert other Samoans before the frequency of LMS conversions increased[20]. In addition to this, the legendary war goddess of Savai'i, Nafanua, prophesied that a new faith would come from abroad. The arrival of LMS missionaries was seen as a fulfillment of that prophecy, offering a route to

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[18] Malama Meleisea. *Lagaga: A Short History of Western Samoa.* Suva: The University of the South Pacific, 1987.

[19] Grace Wildermuth, Heaven and Earth' Samoan Indigenous Religion, Christianity, and the Relationship Between the Samoan People and the Environment." Independent Study Project, SIT Study Abroad, 2012. http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2508&context=isp_collection.

[20] Andrew Robson, "Malietoa, Williams and Samoa's Embrace of Christianity." *The Journal of Pacific History* 44, no. 1 (2009): 23.

the indigenization of Christianity.

Samoa is a profoundly Christian country; social life revolves around the church, and the pastors, *faifeau*, and their family members are treated with reverence. Samoans are said to have seamlessly integrated Christianity into *fa'asamoa,* making practice into a site of indigenous agency enactment. Christianity is also a major part of Samoans' identities. Religious practices and norms influence what aspects of history are emphasized or not, and in the context of Smaoan Christianity, the origins of Samoan people are a particularly contentious topic. I will argue later that the Samoan incorporation of Christianity into *fa'asamoa* is complicated: the religious objections to archaeological findings and displays are at once assertions of Samoan senses of belonging, while also erasing their migratory heritage.

The Samoan museums I will be discussing in this work are the *Falemata'aga* the Museum of Samoa, the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum. I am discussing these two museums because they are some of the best-known Samoan museums, and most clearly articulate with the institutions supporting tourism in Samoa. Also, these museums house and display different collections and have different histories and purposes. These contrasts will elucidate the museums' and tourism's symbolic power and articulations with understandings of Samoan statehood. By discussing the social context of the Museum of Samoa and the Robert Louis Stevenson Museums, I aim to evaluate the ways in which different methods of representing the past and present articulate. How are religious and familial concerns about

legitimacy and belonging answered or obfuscated through museums?

In the next few chapters, I will explore the wider implications of post-colonial international relations and policies on cultural heritage management in the context of the Museum of Samoa. Since most of my fieldwork concentrated on the Museum of Samoa, the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum will be featured as a briefer case study because of the multitude of contrasts with the publicly held institution. These two institutions articulate with questions of belonging in Samoa in different ways, and all of these institutions must be investigated as facilitators of inter-cultural learning and exchange and the dissemination of Samoan cultural and historical narratives of many kinds. This case study will attempt to address how the two museums deal with questions about the nature of belonging in Samoa. These cases will examine a museum that focuses on Samoan people and history, while the other will attempt to understand how a museum dedicated to a European settler elucidates between settler colonists' claims to belonging and how tourists can learn about Samoan culture in the context of a settler's life story.

## Bureaucracy, Belonging, and Nationalism at the Museum of Samoa

The Museum of Samoa is a public museum administered by the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC). The museum is on a compound that features the MESC headquarters. It is located in Apia, Samoa's capital city. The collection is housed in a repurposed, turn-of-the-century German schoolhouse.

Object storage is located in a locked room adjacent to the museum, in an

air-conditioned space. The museum has two floors with air-conditioned rooms typically housing a themed exhibition. When I last visited, in November 2015, the rooms on the ground floor housed an exhibit about Samoa's environment and an exhibit about Pacific arts and cultures. One of the prominent displays was one about the use of Samoan coconut fibers, also called sennit. Galumalemana Steven Percival, a filmmaker, helped compile and prepare materials for this exhibition. He and his wife Wendy founded the Tiapapata Art Centre, a foundation and artist's space meant to promote the practice of both contemporary and traditional arts and crafts. In addition to working with the museum, Galumalemana creates documentaries and serves as a *matai.*

The Museum of Samoa also displays prehistoric pottery and tools, taxidermied animal specimens, traditional tattooing implements, and other objects. Historical photographs are displayed in the entrance stairway. The museum offices are located on the second floor. Museum of Samoa employees are also federal employees working under MESC. One of the major challenges that the Museum of Samoa faces is the relative lack of funds and training for archaeological research and cultural heritage preservation and interpretation[21]. In fact, the first archaeology classes that focus on Samoa were only just recently begun at the National University of Samoa, NUS,

In Samoa, archaeology's short history has been a chaotic one. Some of the

[21] Elizabeth Bennett, "Challenges to Cultural Heritage Preservation and Management at the Falemata'aga, the Museum of Samoa" (SIT Study Abroad, 2015),, http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3251&context=isp_collection.

reasons why archaeology is so contentious and understudied are conflicts between genealogical and oral historical claims to certain lands, religious objections, and perceived incompatibility between museums' representational methods and Samoan intangible culture. Religious objections to certain archaeological narratives underpin a substantial amount of controversy about archaeology. For example, Swedish archaeology student Marie Jonsson relates the troubles facing archaeological studies in Samoa:

> 'The cultural heritage is identified as strong oral traditions like the family history, recited and memorized, along with the daily practice of the deeply rooted *fa'asamoa.* This close and very much alive link to the past makes deeper knowledge about the material remains redundant. Material remains in the shape of monuments can be regarded as threatening since it could prove myths to be wrong. Further, recent archaeological proof of the origin of the first settlers of Samoa is not at all welcomed by everyone, one respondent claims to be insulted by anyone who argues that Samoans were not created by God. Christianity has a strong foothold here, as has the respect for the ancestors who after all were the ones who constructed the remnants in the first place and this provides for unconsciously protection of the material remains…'

The Museum of Samoa deals with the following questions about belonging in Samoa: How are tensions between Samoa's colonial past and present development projects revealing controversies about the nature of belonging? How are representations of oral traditions privileging certain groups' narratives over others'? More specifically, how is belonging negotiated or challenged through the exhibition of material objects or knowledge collected and disseminated through print rather than oral tradition?

Colonial Pasts, Samoan Futures

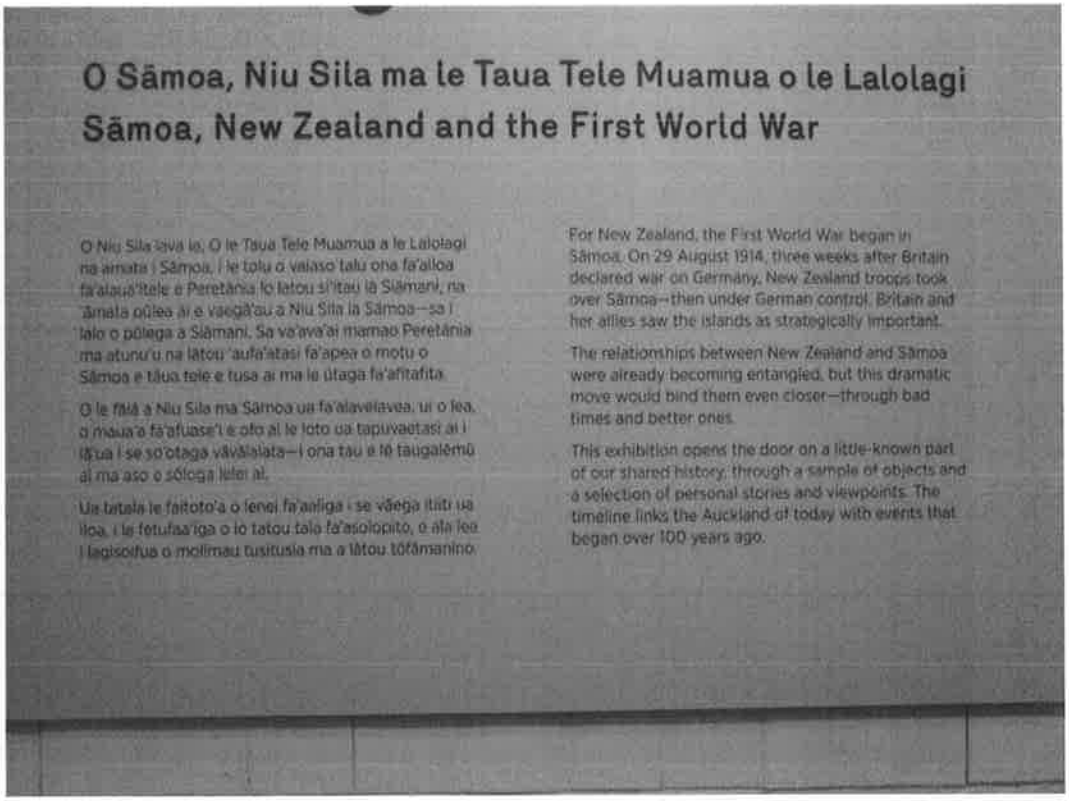
Something that interested me when I began to research my independent study project, the work that preceded this thesis, was the ways in which foreign museums funded and donated objects for exhibition at the Museum of Samoa. What stirred this interest in me was the presence of a certain exhibition that took up the top two floors of the Museum. This exhibition, "Entangled Islands: Sāmoa, New Zealand and the First World War", was a gift rom the Auckland War Memorial Museum – Tāmaki Paenga Hira[22]. The Auckland War Memorial Museum exhibits Māori objects, Pacific peoples' objects, natural history collections, and historic war materiel. Below are images of the placards and some objects. The objects exhibited below are the Samoan ensign, a placard about the Samoan community in Auckland, maps, archival documents, and informational signs.

(Images E.M. Bennett, 2015)

[22] Henceforth Auckland War Memorial Museum.


1953-2014
2003
Mau Sitiseni movement
2014
Sāmoa at home in Auckland


***Entangled Islands—Sāmoa, New Zealand and the First World War*** was developed by Auckland War Memorial Museum–Tāmaki Paenga Hira, and has been gifted to the Museum of Sāmoa with the support of the New Zealand Government.
This exhibition was curated by Auckland Museum in partnership with Professor Toeolesulusulu Damon Salesa.
With thanks to our Samoa translators: Melegalenu'u Ah Sam and Muliagatele Vavao Fetui.
AM




This exhibit examines the relationship between New Zealand and Samoa from World War I onwards. Textual panels, images, and archival objects are exhibited. All of the objects were from New Zealand, and all of the translation work was done there. "Entangled Islands" was not the first collaboration between New Zealand and Samoa. Additional exhibit materials were shared, and have been shared since my visits to the Museum of Samoa.

Marilyn Kohlhase, the chairperson for the Auckland War Memorial Museum's Pacific Advisory Group, outlines this sentiment in a media release about the collaborative exhibit:

> 'This partnership between Auckland Museum and the Museum of Sāmoa is part of the institutional socio-cultural relationship between our two countries, which will add a richer dimension to the identities of both nations

and their communities,' (diacritics original).[23]

Kolhase associates identity enrichment with the affirmation of a previous relationship between Samoa and New Zealand. While the relationship dynamics have changed since Samoa became an independent state, Samoa and New Zealand's relationship is one built upon migration between the two countries, remittances sent from New Zealand, tourism, and foreign aid. This sentiment articulates with wider understandings of infrastructure building and development in postcolonial places as contributing to the post-colonial national identities and to a sense of belonging to a government by one's own people.

The Museum of Samoa addresses questions of belonging in Samoa by juxtaposing archaeological objects, such as Lapita[24] pottery fragments, Samoan wildlife specimens, information about house-building techniques, and an exploration of the relationship between Samoa and its former colonizer New Zealand. The Museum of Samoa and its representational and historical imperative is at the center of questions about belonging due to its perceived incompatibility with oral transmissions of culture and claims to land and chiefly titles. The lack of funding for cultural heritage professional training programs and funding for the museum means that museum professionals cannot work to make the museum a place where questions of belonging may be negotiated, and culture preserved and

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[23] Auckland War Memorial Museum. *Auckland Museum exhibition opens in Sāmoa as part of New Zealand - Sāmoa Friendship Week.* July 31, 2015. http://www.aucklandmuseum.com/media/media-releases/2015/auckland-museum-exhibition-opens-in-samoa-as-part (accessed April 29, 2017).

[24] According to current archaeological evidence, the Lapita are understood to be very early migrants to Polynesia.

interpreted in ways people find agreeable and beneficial to all Samoans.

New dimensions to belonging at the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum

The Robert Louis Stevenson Museum is located in Vailima, about two miles south of Apia. This museum is a privately run museum that holds and displays some of the prolific author's personal effects. The museum is the former residence of Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote *Treasure Island*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and many other books. In an effort to soothe his chronic ailments, he moved to Samoa, building a house he would later dub 'Villa Vailima'. Stevenson apparently studied the Samoan language and wrote fondly of the Samoan people.

The museum's founders are Jim Winegar and Tilafaiga Rex Maughan. Winegar and Maughan are both Americans. They came to Samoa as Mormon missionaries and decided to restore the Villa Vailima after it had fallen into disrepair. After Stevenson left and before it became a museum, the Villa Vailima was the residence for Samoa's head of state and also an important base for colonial governmental operations. When Winegar and Tilafaiga's restoration efforts began, they chose to bring replica or period furniture that resembled pieces present photographic documentation of Stevenson's home[25].

[25] The Robert Louis Stevenson Museum n.d.

(Image courtesy Samoa Tourism Authority, n.d.)[26]

The Robert Louis Stevenson Museum (RLSM) is important to this study because of its history and current purpose. The Villa Vailima is situated amongst a verdant expanse, including part of a mountain. Robert Louis Stevenson is perhaps the most famous white artistic figure to be associated with Samoa. Stevenson (1850-1894) was a prolific author, writing such famous works as *Treasure Island, Kidnapped, and The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* He was chronically ill, seeking respite in climates that were more amenable to his respiratory ailments. He traveled throughout the Pacific before settling in Samoa.

Stevenson and his family journeyed to Samoa from San Francisco in 1888[27]. They hired Samoan servants to help with housework. News of this famous author's

[26] Robert Louis Stevenson Museum, digital image, Samoa.travel, accessed April 9 2017, http://www.samoa.travel/Content/SiteResources/ACTIVITY/1668/rls-hero.jpg

[27] The Robert Louis Stevenson Museum n.d.

arrival apparently interested local Samoan chiefs, particularly who kept the family in their social circles. Stevenson even went so far as to become involved in local politics, penning a book criticizing German colonial actions and subsequent civil war in Samoa[28].

The Museum's exhibits do not contain any explanatory labels. This is because a guide, who interprets the exhibits, accompanies guests at all times. The guides take groups of people through the house, explaining how Robert Louis Stevenson and his family used each room and even related to certain items. The museum's founders, Tilafaiga[29] Rex Maughan and Jim Winegar, paid special attention to the house-turned-museum's furnishings, going so far as to purchase both authentic and replica period pieces[30]

Tilafaiga and Winegar believe that the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum is a continuation of acts of service and benevolence towards Samoa and Samoans (rlsmuseum.org, 2015). Winegar and Tilafaiga's connections to Samoa stem from their days as LDS missionaries. They are not only known for helping restore Robert Louis Stevenson's home, but for helping a botanist preserve a stretch of Samoan rain forest[31] and for constructing schools[32]

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[28] Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa (Cassell, 1892),* https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=HPwqAAAAYAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=samoa+robert+louis+stevenson+&ots=lRfvhg0kv0&sig=rTcsqYLjsvBQJBVOfp7u0WXc4no#v=onepage&q=samoa%20robert%20louis%20stevenson&f=false

[29] It is appropriate to refer to *matai* by their title name rather than their given name.

[30] The Robert Louis Stevenson Museum n.d.

[31] Cox, Paul Allan. *Nafanua: Saving the Samoan Rain Forest.* New York, NY: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1999.

[32] Matthew Brown, "W. SAMOA TENTATIVELY OKS PLAN TO RESTORE WRITER'S HOME," *Deseret News*, October 14, 1990, http://www.deseretnews.com/article/127027/W-SAMOA-TENTATIVELY-OKS-PLAN-TO-RESTORE-

I bring up the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum to add a complicating dimension to the social contexts of museums in Fiji and Samoa. The main way the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum benefits the Samoan economy, and by extension the Samoan people is by appealing to mostly Anglophone visitors or at least those familiar with the English literary canon. Winegar and Tilafaiga locate potential economic development in the Anglophone, publics, composed of native and secondary speakers, who visit the museum and other tourist sites in Samoa.

Winegar and Tilafaiga appeal to the Anglophone visitors, many of whom are of European ancestry, by making Robert Louis Stevenson into a sympathetic settler colonist. Robert Louis Stevenson is portrayed as a sympathetic settler colonist by presenting his life story through his personal affects and the associated spoken narrative and through the spatial arrangement of his estate. Winegar and Tilafaiga have found that emphasizing Stevenson's connections with local people, citing two sympathy-inspiring examples. The first example is the bestowal of his Samoan moniker *Tusitala*, or Storyteller. The second is the use of anecdotes demonstrating how local Samoans adored him and his family, often citing Stevenson's burial on the peak of Mt. Vaea, which looms over his estate.

The Robert Louis Stevenson Museum works to demonstrate a potential case of *palagi*[33] belonging in Samoa. Since Stevenson is a well-known contributor to the

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WRITERS-HOME.html?pg=all.

[33] Samoans often use the term *palagi* to refer to foreigners. One informal term for the English language is *gagana fa'apalagi*, literally translating to 'language in the manner of foreigners'. *Palagi* derived from *papalagi*, which translates to 'sky bursters'. See p. 42 of (Meleisea, 1987,). At the time of European contact, many Samoans believed that European explorers had burst through the boundary between their world (this is often translated as 'heaven', or *lagi*. See p. 238 of (Meleisea 1987).,.

Anglophone literary canon, a site dedicated to his memory might appeal to Anglophone tourists or people familiar with Anglophone literature. Much of the tour relates how the Stevensons adapted to their life in Samoa, and how they cemented their relationships with the locals. The primary method used to relating histories about Stevensons' lives in Samoa is to discuss the names bestowed upon members of the Stevenson family and the mutual fascination and respect between the Stevensons and Samoans.

This museum's role as a tourist attraction causes it to discuss Stevenson's life in Samoa, and by extension, European colonialism in Samoan, in a way that both informative and emotionally satisfying to them. Unfortunately for Samoans, the resulting narrative centers white foreigners' experiences in Samoa. The museum also charges for entry, which potentially creates access barriers for local people.

Stevenson's chronic ailments contributed to his sudden death. According to the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum site and staff, his death caused great anguish to his family and the Samoans who he befriended. This group of Samoans to whom Stevenson had become associated with cut a road into the mountainside. Upon further examination, however, it becomes clear that the road was not built out of pure altruism and adoration for this British author. During Stevenson's time in Samoa, followers of Mata'afa Iosefo and Malietoa Laupepa fought bitterly for control over the Samoan islands. The United States and Germany capitalized on the conflict in order to increase their military and commercial footholds in the South Pacific. This confluence of conflicts eventually led to the partition of Western Samoa, which

would become the Independent State of Samoa, and Eastern Samoa, which would become American Samoa. The Samoans who built this road were loyal to Mata'afa, and built the road as an appreciative gesture after Stevenson wrote *A Footnote to History*, which articulated his support for Mata'afa[34]. When he died, the Samoans had apparently handed the coffin to each other in a line all the way up the mountain (personal archives). The road's name is often translated to 'the road of the loving heart', but inconsistencies in translations have complicated understandings of the road's history[35]. The Museum recommends that visitors make the climb to visit the tomb. Below are images of the trail to the tomb and of the tomb itself.

(Image Spider415 2017)[36]

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[34] Joseph Theroux, "Some Misconceptions about RLS," *The Journal of Pacific History* 16, no. 3 (1981): 164.

[35] Theroux, 164

[36] Spider415, "Robert Louis Stevenson's Grave Atop Mount Vaea.," digital image, Images.travelpod.com, 2017, accessed April 18, 2017, http://images.travelpod.com/tw_slides/ta00/afd/aea/robert-louis-stevensons-grave-atop-mount-vaea-apia.jpg.

The placement of Stevenson's tomb atop Mount Vaea, mostly cleared of vegetation, articulates with the Museum's mission to connect the author with his adopted home. His grave points towards the Pacific Ocean, as if Stevenson is to look over the island and out to the horizon. The tomb faces Scotland. The placement of the tomb atop the mountain implies an ownership of that mountain, or an accomplishment worthy of praise and respect.

The epitaph, one of Stevenson's poems, explicitly communicates a claim to belonging on Samoa and amongst Samoans.

'Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie.
Glad did I lie and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.
Let this be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,

And the hunter home from the hill.'[37]

Stevenson wrote this poem just before he died. Stevenson claims belonging by equating his burial to going home. By also equating himself to someone immersed in the wilderness, both on land and on the ocean, Stevenson acknowledges the foreignness of the place: both culturally and geographically speaking. Stevenson's mobility, engendered by his fame and disposable income, allowed him to seek a place where he could escape the conditions that were worsening his health issues. Thus, in seeking healing and refuge, he sought a home.

After Stevenson died and his family left Samoa, the Villa Vailima served as an administrative building for the German and New Zealand colonial governments before housing the Samoan Head of State for a period of time[38]. Unfortunately, the house languished in the punishing tropical climate. However, Tilafaiga and Winegar saw the economic potential in opening this museum, and truly believe that this tourism development will benefit Samoans.

This quest for wellbeing and novel experiences is echoed in contemporary tourism. Samoa, like many SIDS, uses revenues from tourism for economic and social development projects. The Robert Louis Stevenson Museum is an interesting and important tourist attraction because of its ability to introduce foreign tourists to elements of Samoan history and culture through the lens of the famous Anglophone

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[37] Samoa Tourism Authority. "Visit the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum." http://www.samoa.travel/page/visit-the-robert-louis-stevenson-museum (accessed April 20, 2017)
[38] Lawrence Van Gelder, "Samoans Honor Adopted Son, the Teller of Tales," *The New York Times,* December 8, 1994, http://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/08/books/samoans-honor-adopted-son-the-teller-of-tales.html

author's life.

How does the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum deal with questions about belonging in Samoa? It answers these questions by situating the museum, a house and a reconstruction of its original furnishings, within the narrative of the Stevensons' lives as Euro-American[39] settlers in Samoa. By situating the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum elucidates an additional dimension to belonging in Samoa. That dimension is that of settler colonists. Although Stevenson was not a colonial government agent, he still settled in Samoa and utilized structures put in place by colonialism. His quest for a climate and culture amenable to his health led him to create a new home in Samoa, to seek belonging. Thus, the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum deals with, and implicitly asks visitors, a new variation on an old question: just *who* belongs in Samoa, and why? And more broadly, it asks how colonialism belongs in indigenous Samoan histories, and what that belonging looks like.

## Relating Information and Belonging

As the Samoan government works towards meeting development goals, it is ever more conscious of the boons that education and tourism could provide for its citizens. However, the government is keenly aware of the ways in which cultural heritage preservation and interpretation, both through museums and through other ventures, could prove to be problematic for multiple publics. I argue that there are two main issues that cultural heritage professionals and organizations, including

[39] Robert Louis Stevenson's wife, Fanny, was American.

museums, encounter in Samoa. The first issue is the conflict between oral histories and archaeological records. The second issue is funding.

Scholars of Samoan history and culture remark that museums are not suited to preserving and interpreting Samoan history and culture because museums are understood to be places that nullify cultural fluidity. This understanding, combined with traditional understandings of the politics of knowledge described earlier, makes the museum into a place that is irrelevant, a place not to be used. Thus, it is believed that the type of knowledge that undergirds Samoans' senses of belongings cannot be presented in museums because presenting it would threaten the knowledge's power, the power that necessitates its transmission to a selected few.

In Samoa, the incorporation of museums into economic and institutional development articulates with widespread assumptions that the construction of infrastructures and institutions in a postcolonial place contributes to the construction of national identities. The advent of cultural tourism at once gives opportunities for practitioners of traditional arts and keepers of indigenous knowledge to make a living. The display and interpretation of Samoan culture in museums at once allows for people who frequent museums and see them as valuable cultural institutions to access Samoan culture and history in a way that makes sense to them. Other than school groups, most of the people who visit the museum are tourists.

The conflicting goals: the ability to transmit knowledge in a way that is compatible with traditional practices, and economic security through development

initiatives place museums in difficult positions: museums cannot become places that are relevant to the communities in which they are located if they do not have funding and public support. What is so difficult about this situation is that the Museum of Samoa has the potential to become a cultural institution that operates in ways that are not seen as threatening Samoans' senses of belonging and as oppositional to Samoan intangible culture. It could do this if the Museum of Samoa, MESC, and museum professional training programs had sufficient funding and institutional support to conduct programming and create spaces for Samoans to feel like the museum is a place where they can share histories and cultural practices without feeling like they are compromising the power associated with that knowledge.

## **CHAPTER THREE**: Fiji

### Fiji History

Fiji is an independent state located southwest of Samoa and east of Vanuatu.

It is a unitary parliamentary constitutional republic. Fiji is located along the boundaries of the Melanesia and Polynesia cultural areas, and Indigenous Fijians have done diplomacy with, traded with, married, and fought wars against many Pacific peoples and nations. Fiji is often categorized as part of Melanesia, but retains cultural similarities to Tonga and Samoa, societies with which Fijians had diplomatic, marital, warfare, and commercial ties.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the Fiji Islands have been occupied for over 3,500 years. Pre-contact Fiji was divided into clans and family groups, *yavusa* and *mataqali*, each headed by a chief. The multiplicity of islands and groups that lived on them engendered a lively network of trade, migration, and even warfare[40]. A powerful warlord, the *Tui Viti*, which translates to 'king of Fiji', was able to gain power over the islands.

The first Europeans to lay eyes on the archipelago were Abel Tasman and his crewmates, who happened upon the islands in 1643. European and American colonial activities and interests exacerbated tensions between Indigenous Fijian chiefdoms, eventually forcing Ratu Sau Cakobau, the Tui Viti, to consolidate power and eventually cede administrative powers to the British in order to maintain stability and unity in the face of European colonial rivalries' threats to tear the islands asunder[41]. In 1874, to with the port town Levuka as its capital, Fiji was ceded to the United Kingdom as a crown colony. Customarily held Indigenous Fijian lands

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[40] Brij V. Lal. *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century*. Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1992. Pp. 4-5.

[41] Lal, pp. 9-12.

were barred from sale, but freehold, non-customary, lands could be bought, sold, and leased freely.

From 1874 to 1916, Indian indentured workers, *girmityas*, were brought to work plantations. Ethnic Fijian *mataqalis*, patrilineal kin groups, now hold more than 83 percent of the land inalienably[42]. Since the sale of Indigenous Fijian lands was banned, Indo-Fijians were made to lease land from Indigenous Fijian landlords. After the leases ran out, however, many Indo-Fijians were left landless and unable to make a living. This disenfranchisement engendered vast informal settlements where residents have virtually no access to sanitation, electricity, safe building materials, and potable water. One of the dimensions to Indo-Fijians' fights for legislative representation and legal parity is by fighting In 1940, the Native Land Trust Board was created in order to facilitate leasing and manage the affairs of Indigenous Fijian lands.[43] Indigenous Fijian people also experience this disenfranchisement, which typically happens when their crops fail or they cannot find other work. It is estimated that around 7% of Fijians inhabit informal settlements[44].

Fiji is a multicultural society, and has been since the Fiji Islands were first settled. Pre-Western contact Fiji was in trading and familial relationships with many Pacific societies. Rotuma, an island about 300 miles northwest of VIti Levu, is home to a group of people who consider themselves, and are considered by Indo-Fijians

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[42] Ministry of Local Government, Housing & Environment Department of Town & Country Planning. *Land Tenure.* 2015.

[43] Lal, p. 134

[44] Matilda Simmons. *7% of Fiji Population Living in Informal Squatter Settlements.* July 7, 2016. http://www.pireport.org/articles/2016/07/12/7-fiji-population-living-informal-squatter-settlements (accessed January 1, 2017)

and Indigenous Fijians, to be ethnically and culturally different. Rotuma's distance from the rest of the Fiji islands and its proximity to what is understood to be the Polynesian cultural locale. Tonga's proximity to Fiji engendered the mixing of Fijian and Tongan cultures and peoples in the Lau group, an archipelago east of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, the largest Fijian islands.

In *Broken Waves,* Brij V. Lal explains that after the end of Girmit, Indo-Fijians were discriminated against in the following ways: they were subject to hiring discrimination, they were thought to be conspiring with their compatriots fighting for independence in India, and they were thought to compete with Indigenous Fijians and Europeans economically[45]. Ironically, the British did not seem to recognize the role they played in colonizing Fiji, taking land from Indigenous Fijians, instituting colonial governments, and bringing Girmityas as laborers. They seemed keen to lay the foundation for early 20th century Fijian laws on the ideas that Indo-Fijians did not belong in Fiji at all. Although British colonial authorities saw the Indigenous Fijians as lazy and lacking the character necessary to pursue their own interests in an effective way, they feared that the Indigenous Fijians

Unfortunately, Fiji's government has seen four military coups in the last 30 years. Lal attributes the foundation of Fijian governmental instability and the social issues that plague this nation to a deliberate ignorance of social changes:

> 'The principal political failure of postcolonial Fiji during the first two decades [of independence] was the unwillingness of its leaders tor recognize the changed and changing realities of Fiji's society and politics. New problems and issues defying simple racial or political categorization arose and demanded bold and imaginative responses and leadership. These were

[45] Lal, p.141.

> absent in the aging, entrenched leaders, convinced for their fundamental right to govern and unwilling to share power with others except on their own terms.'[46]

Two coups happened in 1987, one in 2006, and one in 2006. These coups inspired further debates about political representation for all Fijians, regardless of race, and the nature of governance.

During the 20th century, the Fiji Museum underwent significant changes. According to Ramsay, the museum director, Bruce Palmer, undertook initiatives to turn the Fiji Museum into an institution that acted 'as a store for the remains of a neglected culture and as a centre for presentation of lectures to one that would play a more social role and engage the community'[47]

The questions of belonging that are asked, contested, and answered in the Fiji Museum are predicated upon the presences and absences of certain objects and narratives over the course of the museum's existence. I will present the following case study as a brief chronology of the museum's changing representational policies and methods over time. These changes reflect the evolution of post-colonial ethnic tensions since the advent of *Girmit* and Fiji's independence.

The most famous museum in Fiji is the Fiji Museum, a government-run museum located in Suva. The Fiji Museum was founded in 1904, but its administrative organization and mission have changed extensively since then. The Fiji Museum's facilities have expanded as well, adding a performance space and research library. Other than the Fiji Museum, smaller collections are dispersed

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[46] Lal, p. 216

[47] Allison Ramsay, "Fiji Museum History" (Suva, July 10, 2013). p. 8

throughout the country, usually associated with historic sites. The Fiji Museum also hosts various open days, specifically targeting local people and students, inviting them to engage with the collections in an intimate way. My main goal in discussing Fijian museums is discussing the ways in which the quandaries of negotiating sociopolitical belonging on the state-wide scale (in other words, attempting to answer the question 'who is Fijian?') is done through incorporating objects into both local and national historical and cultural narratives. Below are images I took of the Fiji Museum's exterior and the exhibit immediately after the entrance.

(Images E.M. Bennett, 2017)

Take note that the first thing one is supposed to see is this Fijian canoe. Canoes and other watercraft like them are symbolically salient to many Pacific peoples because of their maritime connections to other societies and their use of the ocean for resources. The canoes also symbolize the Pacific peoples' pasts as voyagers, and those who believe that Pacific peoples were the descendants of migrants from Southeast Asia will certainly see the presence of the voyaging canoe as a direct link to the past.

This gallery's maritime theme means that there is an absence of memorabilia relating to Girmit and Girmityas immediately near the entrance. One might also ask where a plow or digging stick might be, which could be symbols that acknowledge the agricultural traditions of Girmityas, their descendants, and Indigenous Fijians

who inhabit the islands' interiors. However, these materials are present in different sections of the museum.

Among the galleries open for viewing include the Girmit gallery, the Fiji History gallery, Fijian bark cloth known as Masi, and a natural history gallery. Each of the galleries has different displays that elucidate different aspects of Fiji's history and cultures. The museum also has a library attached to it and an archaeology lab. In addition to this, the museum has just recently built an extended entrance area that serves at once as a performance space, a gathering space, and as the seating area for the museum's café.

Museum History

The Fiji Museum's lengthy history reflects Fiji's own. The Fiji Museum's original founders were members of the colonial elite, and according to Ramsay,

> 'Institutions such as museums were established during the colonial era as a result of people of European descent collecting the artefacts of the cultures they observed but which most did not necessarily understand. It is demonstrated that in its formative years, the Fiji Museum with colonial whites and their efforts concentrated mainly on the tangible heritage of indigenous Fijians.'[48]

Ramsay implies that the colonial elites, who were almost exclusively wealthy white people, understood 'Fijian' to mean 'Indigenous Fijian'. The colonial elite's focus on physical objects related to Indigenous Fijians resulted in the initial exclusion of objects associated with Indo-Fijians and other ethnic groups. This exclusion would be contested.

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[48] Ramsay, p. 6

Representations and Belonging: Fiji

The Fiji Museum's collections were originally meant to facilitate the study of indigenous Fijian material culture and customs. However, the museum's collections have expanded as national discourses surrounding the nature of belonging in Fiji, of being Fijian, were questioned. It became apparent that the museum should also exhibit items from the multitude of ethnic and cultural groups residing in the Fiji islands, including Indo-Fijians, Chinese, iKiribati and Rotumans.

In 1974 and 1979, the Fiji Museum published a series of interviews with former Girmityas and opened an exhibit about Indo-Fijians[49]. This marked the beginning of a revitalization of the museum's representational capacities, one that would attempt to bring together a more holistic representation of Fiji. In this context, the staff diversified, echoing the understanding that belonging in Fiji was not exclusively to be understood and assessed with an Indigenous Fijian-Indo Fijian binary.

I will now discuss the contents of the exhibitions. Among the museum's galleries are the Girmit gallery, the *Masi*, or Fijian bark cloth, gallery, the Fiji History gallery, the Maritime gallery, through which visitors enter, the Natural History gallery. The visitors' path through the Maritime gallery forces them to think about the origins of Fiji's peoples and the connection Fijians have to the rest of the Pacific. As they walk into the Fiji History gallery, they come across artifacts from British colonists and other ethnic groups. Upstairs are the Indo-Fijian gallery, which is full

[49] Ramsay, p. 53.

of artifacts from the Girmit era. Upon the wall is a hanging that depicts part of the *Ramayana*, a famous Indian epic. This epic is significant for members of the Indian diaspora, and perhaps its presence in the museum marks an acceptance of Indo-Fijian narratives not previously seen.

According to a recent Fiji Times article, the Fiji Museum is looking to modify its galleries, in particularly adding a section about Fijian Olympic athletes[50]. I take this modification and addition to be a gesture towards an articulation of Fijian-ness with modernity, with connections to the outside world. The Fijian Men's Rugby Sevens team won a gold medal at the 2016 summer Olympics, making history and inspiring a generation of Fijians. In a way, this addition would assert that Fijians, as indigenous peoples, belong in modernity as much as their fellow athletes from colonial metoropoles.

## Contesting the Girmit Narratives

Indo-Fijians' history makes them both unique and targets for racial, religious, and economic discrimination. Ethnic tensions are entrenched in Fijian society and discourses, and I argue that it is a consequence of economic insecurity brought about through British colonial rule and policies.As I previously stated, Grimit was a migration of thousands of Indian workers seeking economic security. The British diametrically opposed Indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, artificially creating

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[50] Litia Cava, "Plan for Bigger Museum," *The Fiji Times Online*, October 30, 2016, http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=376573.

circumstances that would lead to ethnic strife and economic inequality. Despite this, Indo-Fijians have made the best of their circumstances, running businesses, becoming elected officials, graduating from university, and asserting their belonging through a variety of means.

Just as the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum comments on questions of belonging and representation within the context of 19th century Samoa, alternative forms of representation have surfaced in reaction to different instances of representation, misrepresentation, or non-representation. Indo-Fijians in particular have resisted symbolic rejections of their belonging by pushing for the creation of monuments to Girmityas or by demanding the exhibition of Indo-Fijian artifacts and narratives in the Fiji Museum.

Indo-Fijians have advocated for representational equity in a multitude of ways. One of the most interesting ways is through the opening of their own monument a Girmit-era tragedy. In 1984, an eccentric Indo-Fijian named Harigyan Simalia desired to erect a monument to a maritime accident that killed many Girmityas. In 1884, the *Syria* had hit a reef, causing the ship to sink. Indigenous Fijians came to the Girmityas' aid, but many still perished. Simalia's monument aligned with Indo-Fijian desires to be represented on a national scale, as a monument to the shipwreck would link the history of Indian immigrant laborers to a wider history of Fiji[51]

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[51] Martha Kaplan, "Blood on the Grass and Dogs Will Speak: Ritual Politics and the Nation in Independent Fiji," in *Nation Making: Emergent Identities in Postcolonial Melanesia*, ed. Robert John Foster (University of Michigan Press, 1997), https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=1nQJAxI6AJoC&oi=fnd&pg=PA95&dq=Kaplan+kelly+fiji+simalia&ots=8C8uMNuMtz&sig=cDetFfQPzkhNKeuDVepV-YTb5ZA#v=onepage&q&f=false. p.

According to Kaplan, the monument construction and opening was exclusively undertaken by Simalia and the Fiji Girmit Association. The monument featured a statue, representing the wrecked ship's figurehead, that 'represents both the Hindu goddess Lakshmi and the Fijian ancestor goddess Adi Sovanatabua, who will bring the world's wealth to Fiji.'[52] This combination of deities in a monument can be taken to suggest a push by Simalia for equal respect of Fijian and Indo-Fijian religious traditions and cosmologies. I use this example to point out how Indo-Fijians' resistance to discrimination and fights for representation in politics and in cultural institutions occurred outside of the Museum of Fiji. I wanted to demonstrate that this was a national phenomenon as much as a Fiji Museum phenomenon.

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[52] Kaplan, pp. 96-7

## Conclusions, Conjectures, Future Research

In the cases of both the Museum of Samoa and the Fiji Museum, the museums each receive their funding from their respective governments. The location of funding and resources within state apparatuses complicates museums' roles as educational and tourist institutions. This is because the state, though monetary allocation, has a measure of control over how and what museums exhibit objects, hire staff and volunteers, plan and execute programming, and how they design their exhibits and labels. Thus, the state has control over the representational powers of museums, and the ways in which museums can articulate with political and cultural definitions and histories of belonging. Because of museums' roles as tourist and research facilities, they are often seen as special developmental projects. The use of museums as developmental projects casts them into the center of debates about the roles that traditional cultural practices and norms play in the nation-state.

### Future Research

In the future, I would like to compare the social contexts of museums in Pacific Island territories such as the Cook Islands and French Polynesia (Polynésie française) with those of independent states. Something I would also like to research is the history of collecting Pacific objects in non-Pacific museums, such as the

Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History, and other large museums. I am also interested in studying the repatriation claims concerning Pacific Islander individuals and objects of cultural patrimony. Perhaps in future research I will be able to assess in depth the 'tourist gaze' in regards to cultural practices and objects of cultural patrimony. I would also like to see if Samoans or Fijians who go to these museums view themselves as tourists, or as alienated from the objects and knowledge that the museums exhibit.

I have long ruminated upon the fieldwork and study project upon which this thesis is based. Although I did fieldwork for my project before the allotted research period began, I had difficulty scheduling periods in which to do field visits because of the museum staff's schedules, difficulties with transportation, and my other research activities. I did not have as much of a chance to do fieldwork at the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum because of the time and money it took to get there and because my research project focused almost exclusively on the Museum of Samoa. Thus, I was unable to supplement the information I could obtain through books or the internet with field data. In the future, I would like to do more fieldwork at the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum and study how academics, cultural heritage professionals, and ordinary Samoans understand the museum.

Were I to conduct further research, I would like to examine how the flow of monetary, human, physical, and technical resources between different countries and museums influences exhibit design and displays. How are neocolonial and postcolonial relationships defined and reinforced through these collaborations? Just

as I discovered while writing this thesis, answering this and other questions engenders a multiplicity of derivative questions.

One of my biggest obstacles in writing this thesis was my ever-present impulse to answer questions, ask more questions, and answer those. The mere presence of an unanswered question was frustrating, but I soon realized that unanswered questions were not the enemy. Perhaps it is not my job to answer those questions. Perhaps, questions about belonging writ large in the politics of knowledge that dominate museum practices are best left open for debate.

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