

The background of the entire page is a photograph of the United States flag, featuring its stars and stripes, draped over a grey brick wall. The flag is slightly wrinkled and the colors are somewhat muted, giving it a historical or aged appearance.

# **ON THE EDGE OF EMPIRE**

## **AGENCY AND IMPERIALIST PRACTICES IN THE U.S. TERRITORY OF AMERICAN SAMOA**

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## ABSTRACT:

American Samoa's status as an unincorporated, unorganized territory of the United States is a peculiar one: unincorporation into a formal American empire strips the U.S. nationals in this territory of equal and reciprocal political relations while a federal government holds plenary power over the territory, on the one hand, whereas unincorporation also allows for autonomous spaces of political and cultural self-determination and sovereign action, on the other hand. American Samoa's unincorporation creates clear tensions between conditions of protection and subjugation, which have motivated Samoan agency in ways that both undermine and uphold the imperial status quo between a federal government who holds plenary power over the territory and the Samoan people. Agency in face of legal, political, and cultural disenfranchisement within the American empire is the main focal point of this thesis, as it addresses the research question: how have American Samoans exercised agency distinct from the dominant power within the American imperial state, and what have been the effects of the way they exercised that agency?

My analysis of three key aspects of the American empire—territory, exceptionalism, and cultural violence—through primary documents in the form of court cases, newspapers, magazines, photographs, and documentaries highlights how American Samoans have exercised agency in the face of hegemonic political practices characterized by imperial amnesia and territorial disenfranchisement. In light of these practices, it is shown how the agency of Samoans has been driven to the interstices of power and can be located in practices of everyday life. I show how agency—which is by nature heterogeneous and multidirectional—has operated as a double-edged sword, particularly in practices of daily life, as it both undermines the hegemonic power and keeps in place the unequal status quo. Exposing the (unintended) consequences of the way Samoans have exercised agency is

integral to efforts for transformative political, legal, and social change within the American imperial state.

**KEY WORDS:** Agency; American Empire; Imperialist Practices; American Samoa; Territory; Exceptionalism; Cultural Violence

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## PREFACE

When I decided to enroll for the program of American Studies at Radboud University, my parents celebrated my decision by buying me shoes in red and blue stars and stripes, matching socks, a matching scarf, and a shirt by a famous American designer who is known for using American flag iconography for his clothing designs. Their reasoning behind this extravagant gift set: I must love America. For, why else would I choose to spend the foreseeable years of my future studying it? Although I had no intention of ever wearing this “fan-girl” outfit, perhaps a part of my parents’ reasoning was true; one needs to have a certain fascination with the United States to commit to studying it and, as I learned throughout my years as student of “America,” to combat the inevitable disappointment one feels when engaging with North America so intensely at an academic level.

This disappointment does not stem in any way from the program at Radboud or from the classes I took, nor from the enthusiasm conveyed by my professors and the teaching staff. Rather, this disappointment is generated by the encounter with a peculiar gap between what America professes to be and what reality shows it truly is. Indeed, being critical about anything can be hard; it can make one skeptical, cynical even, and it can drive one to flat-out dislike the subject of inquiry, making us forget why we chose to study it in the first place. But, when I recently rediscovered my parents’ gift set, unworn, in a far corner of my closet, it made me smile. I realized when holding those hideous shoes, it was not a romance with America (nor its iconography, for that matter) that drove my interest in it, but a certain fascination that motivated me to continue studying it—a fascination prompted by the discovery of a deep-lying, pervasive will of Americans to improve and close that formidable gap between the devastating realities of racism, poverty, and violence that keep haunting the country, on the one hand, and the utopic ideals of liberty, democracy, and equal rights for all, on the other. It is this fascination with the will to improve that drove the research behind this

thesis. And, as I kept digging deeper into the history and contemporary formations of American empire as well as the case of American Samoa and its place in that empire, I was reminded that the “grand experiment” in American democracy had not failed; it was an ongoing process that is worth fighting for, even according to some of the most disenfranchised American political subjects such as American Samoans.

My fascination with my thesis project, however, did not only stem from Americans’ pervasive will to improve their condition, but (closer to home) was also fostered by those who helped me complete this project. First and foremost, both Jorrit van den Berk and Markha Valenta spent large chunks of their time helping me dig deeper into the research, helping me ask the “right” questions, and, perhaps more importantly, helping me answer those questions as meticulously as I could. Without their help, their guidance, and their insights, this thesis project would not be what it is today. To them, I owe a big “thank you.” I would also like to thank professor Marit Monteiro for offering additional insights to my project, as well as my friends Nellie, Funda, Nadia, and Ine for proofreading portions of this thesis and for their emotional support. A special thanks, moreover, goes to study coach Iris Monteiro for helping me through the ups and downs that inevitably come with thesis writing and for getting me started again, even when the going got tough.

I would also like to thank my parents for their extravagant gift set and the unrelenting support that it stands for. I call their support “unrelenting” because even though they had no idea what my studies entailed (“I don’t speak English, so I wouldn’t understand,” as my mother repeatedly threw off my attempts to explain it) or what job it would eventually get me (“Will you become an American?” is the question I was asked by too many relatives), they supported me, both emotionally and financially, nonetheless. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Eloy, for all the above and everything else. Without him, this thesis might not have come into existence at all.



## GLOSSARY OF SAMOAN TERMS

<i>‘afakasi</i>	person of mixed, partial Samoan ancestry
<i>āiga</i>	family or families
<i>‘āigapotopoto</i>	extended family
<i>aumaga</i>	the village organization of untitled men
<i>fā‘aalalo</i>	respect
<i>fā‘asāmoa</i>	Samoan way of life
<i>fā‘amatai</i>	chiefly system of governance
<i>Fita Fita</i>	Naval police force of only Samoans
<i>fono</i>	village or district council meetings
<i>Fono</i>	territorial meeting, today the legislature of the territory
<i>matai</i>	titled chief
<i>mau</i>	public opposition
<i>O le Mau</i>	eastern Samoan <i>mau</i> movement
<i>Mau a le Pule</i>	western Samoan <i>mau</i> movement
<i>pule</i>	authority
<i>taupou</i>	high-ranking chief’s daughter
<i>tautua</i>	service

## MAPS OF THE SAMOAN ISLANDS



Figure 1: American Samoa. Source: Google Maps. 2020.

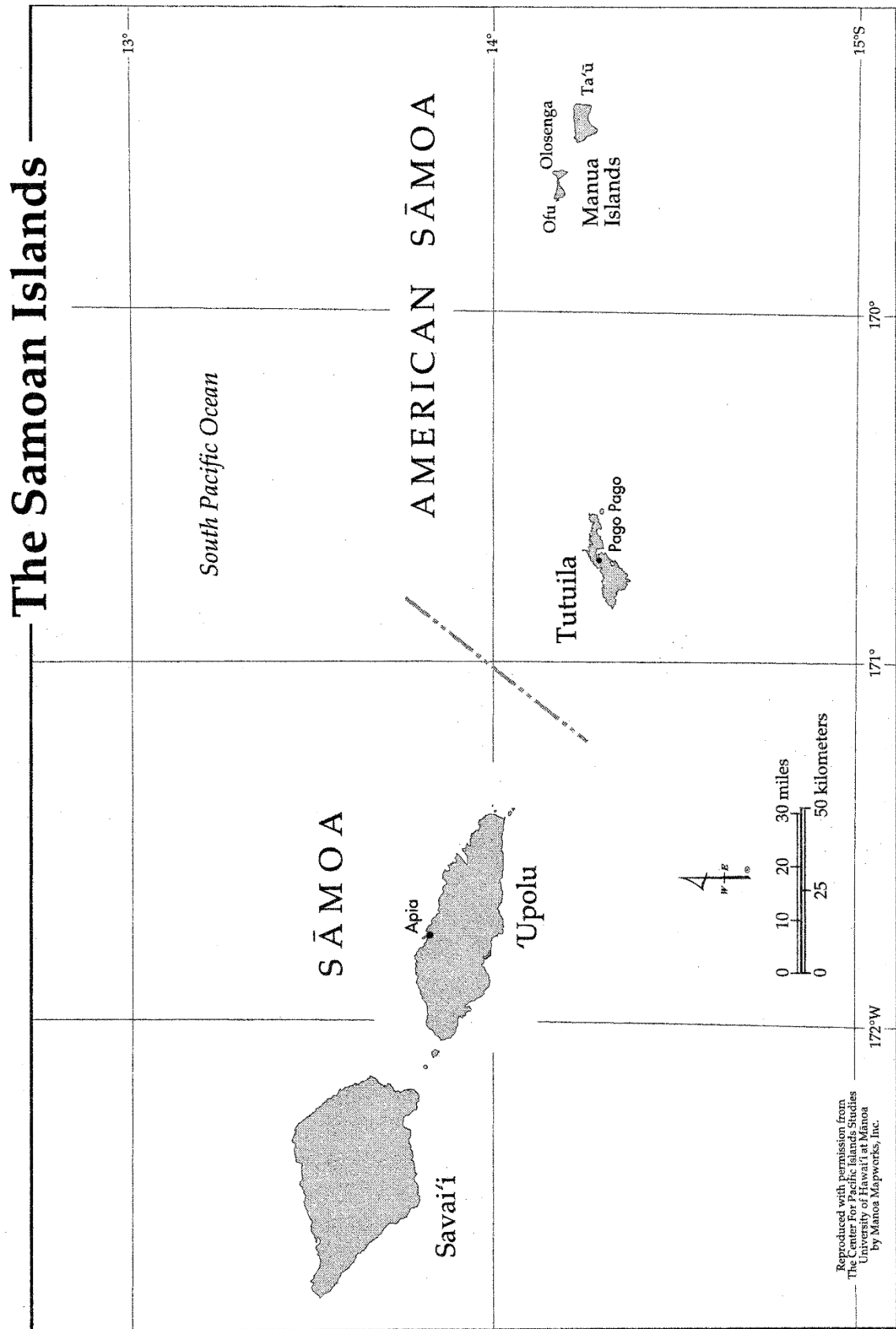


Figure 2: "The Samoan Islands." Reprinted from David Chappell, "The Forgotten Mau: Anti-Navy Protest in American Samoa, 1920–1935," page 221.

## INTRODUCTION

### AGENCY IN “AMERICA’S FORGOTTEN COLONIES”

On June 17, 2013, a delegate was introduced to speak to the House of Representatives by Republican Representative Kerry Bentivolio of Michigan, pro tempore speaker of that day, with the following words: “The chair recognizes the gentleman from American Semolia, mister Eni...Faluebenga” (Maddow). Mispronouncing not only the delegate’s name, which was Eni Faleomavaega, but also stammering the delegate’s origin as if he had never heard of it before, effectively obscuring the part of the United States that delegate Faleomavaega represented, no doubt instilled the question in the minds of some who this gentleman was or where “American Semolia” was in the first place. Indeed, it often escapes attention that there are five members of the House of Representatives who do not represent a district within a state but represent the unincorporated parts of the United States, commonly known as the territories. These representatives are called delegates, and although they have a voice in the House, they do not have a vote.<sup>1</sup> After the inarticulate and, one might say, ignorant introduction of delegate Faleomavaega to the House, he graciously took the stand and began to speak by correcting only the name of the territory that he actually represents: “American Samoa.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These representatives are four delegates from the territories of Guam, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands (one from each) and one resident commissioner from Puerto Rico. Two more delegates represent Washington D.C. and the Cherokee Nation (the latter serves since 2019).

<sup>2</sup> As one of very few Native Americans who represents his people in the House of Representatives, Delegate Faleomavaega stood before the House that day to demand political action regarding the problematic name of the NFL team of Washington, D.C., “the Redskins.” While taking a consolidating stance with his “Native American brothers and sisters,” he blamed the “impasse” that had befallen the debate on changing the pejorative name of the team on “the widespread ignorance regarding the history of this denigrating term,” which echoes a similarly widespread ignorance towards imperialist practices that underly the history of the United States more generally, as I argue later in this thesis (Faleomavaega H3657). More so, the debate itself demonstrates the weight of names and terms in today’s society, which emphasizes the significance of Representative Bentivolio’s mispronunciation/misrecognition. See Title VIII of the 1975 Native American Programs Act for the designation of Samoans as Native Americans.

Representative Bentivolio's failure to recognize the territory of American Samoa and properly introduce its delegate (who had by then been serving as Delegate for no less than twenty-four years)<sup>3</sup> is certainly not an isolated occurrence. Rather, it is but one example of a larger trend within American politics to be unaware of or deliberately neglect that the United States is not a collection of *only* states but of states *and* territories.<sup>4</sup> These territories, or "America's forgotten colonies" as one documentary maker called them (Wahlen n.p.), are not only frequently ignored but have also deliberately been excluded from American domestic as well as foreign politics due to their status as "unincorporated" parts of the United States (Immerwahr, *How to Hide* 8). Effectively, the territories' status as "unincorporated," meaning they are a part of the United States but are not fully integrated, has impeded equal and reciprocal political relations between territorial residents and a federal government that holds plenary power over these territories—a federal government who, as Representative Bentivolio so aptly illustrated, fails to recognize them or their representation in the U.S. political system as an intrinsic part of the United States. Delegate Faleomavaega's collected response to Bentivolio's non-recognition, articulated from a disenfranchised position in which his vote does not count but his voice can and should be heard properly, can be regarded as an attempt to exercise *agency* in the face of America's selective amnesia towards him and the disenfranchised people he represents.

The selective amnesia that I refer to here is perhaps best defined as "imperial amnesia," a term that I borrow from Amy Kaplan, who used it to call out American studies in the mid-1990s for largely neglecting to include the study of empire in American cultural studies as well as the exclusion of American culture in studies of empire and postcolonial studies ("Left Alone" 17). Although Kaplan's assertion no longer holds true today (Kramer,

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<sup>3</sup> Mr. Faleomavaega (D) served as delegate from American Samoa from 1989 until 2015 and was succeeded by Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen, who currently still serves. Mister Faleomavaega passed away in 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use "American" and "U.S." interchangeably to avoid repetition. I recognize the issues involved with using a hemispheric designation for a national one. My doing so is purely for editorial reasons.

“Power and Connection” 1363; Stoler 833), the term is still relevant but perhaps in a different, more pervasive way: the imperial amnesia that Representative Bentivolio employed is representative of a hegemonic political practice of imperial denial and colonial disbelief, part of a selective memory process that has pervaded American politics in the past three centuries (Kramer, “Power and Connection” 1357). To be more precise, the United States has continuously claimed neither to be nor have an empire, at least not in the mold of previous empires, such as the Roman or British, and that its territories are not colonies, while simultaneously disenfranchising the residents of those territories, politically and economically as well as culturally (Go, “Provinciality” 74; Goldstein 14; Greene 5). Although plenty of scholars (including Americanists, such as Amy Kaplan, historians of empire and U.S. history more generally, and scholars of Native American and African American studies, among others), activists, and politicians (including many of the delegates from the territories, such as Delegate Faleomavaega) have worked hard to expose the imperial underpinnings of the United States, ignorance towards the territories and the political disenfranchisement of the U.S. citizens and U.S. nationals who live there continues to inform hegemonic political practices.<sup>5,6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> I return to what I call “hegemonic political practices” in the next chapter, in which I also elaborate on the discrepancy between arguments made in what has been called an “accelerating avalanche” of scholarship on American empire, on the one hand, and the pervasive imperial amnesia in hegemonic political practices, on the other (Immerwahr, “The Greater United States” 382).

<sup>6</sup> A recent example that illustrates how such hegemonic political practices operate and how they affect the residents of the territories is the Trump administration’s failure to recognize that Puerto Ricans have as much right to aid and disaster relief as U.S. citizens of, for instance, the state of Florida. After hurricane Maria devastated much of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the fall of 2017, leaving nearly 3,000 dead and many more injured and homeless—a death toll denied until this day by the Trump Administration, who places “official” numbers at 64—the Trump administration initially seemed to be unaware of the fact that it was their responsibility to provide federal aid (FEMA and otherwise) to the U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico (Barclay, Campbell, and Irfan). (President Trump initially also seemed unaware of the fact that Puerto Ricans were U.S. citizens and that he was their president.) Indeed, as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to housing, Leilani Farha, observed in the aftermath of the storm: “We can’t fail to note the dissimilar urgency and priority given to the emergency response in Puerto Rico, compared to the US states affected by hurricanes in recent months” (United Nations, “Puerto Rico”). A 2018 rapport by Oxfam confirmed the U.N.’s initial findings and added that the lack of adequate aid, particularly in the form of fresh water, disproportionately affected women in Puerto Rico, an already more disenfranchised group than the male citizens of the island (Oxfam).

## RESEARCH QUESTION

A contemporary U.S. imperial landscape characterized by a hegemonic political climate of imperial amnesia and territorial disenfranchisement not only underlies the limited, non-voting status of delegates in the House of Representatives but also the political disenfranchisement of residents of the territories in the form of a lack of adequate representation in the federal government, a lack of voting rights in selecting that federal government, a limited application of the U.S. Constitution, and, in the case of American Samoa, the denial of U.S. citizenship altogether. Such continued disenfranchisement opens up space for critical inquiry into the possibility for and scope of the agency of U.S.-territorial subjects. On the one hand, territorial subjects are restricted in agency by an imperial landscape that predominantly situates power with the state elite, whereas on the other hand, a lack of access to power leads residents of the U.S. territories to seek alternative sites for agency, which provide them with alternate ways for animating social change in a manner distinct from the dominant power. Derived from the field of postcolonial studies and its approach of rereading colonial history from the bottom up, the concept of agency provides for an analytic framework that locates the possibility for change with those of inferior status, which Gayatri Spivak called the “subaltern” (3), rather than with the elite, while emphasizing “the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite*” (Guha, “On Some Aspects” 19, original emphasis). Indeed, postcolonial studies aims to locate an agency of change in the subaltern subject in order to resist the “reification of agency as a capacity held only by the elite” (Hanchey 12), which Ranajit Guha refers to as a “politics of the people” (“On Some Aspects” 40). Following this approach, this thesis addresses the following research question: How have residents of the U.S. territory of American Samoa exercised agency within the American imperial state and what have been the effects of the way they exercised that agency?

I aim to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on American empire, not by analyzing the case of American Samoa as an episodic appendix to United States history under the guise of an “imperial moment” with its roots in 1898, but by offering insights into the lasting effects of both U.S. imperialist practices and Samoan agency in relation to those practices. I define imperialist practices, following Julian Go and Karen Armstrong, as “the political control or use of force over other states or territories, either temporary or permanent, as a measure of U.S. involvement in various global sites” (Armstrong 50; see also Go, “Waves of Empire” 8). Agency in the case of American Samoa and by very nature of operating under restrictions set by imperialist practices, I argue, has functioned as a double-edged sword, both undermining the hegemonic power and keeping in place the unequal, imperial status quo that comes with it. In my analysis of agency, I presuppose that colonial subjects are not passive, receiving agents of Western political and cultural dominance, a presupposition supported not only by Spivak’s interpretation of the “subaltern” or Guha’s “politics of the people” but also by Homi Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity,” which premises that cultures are not self-contained unities but rather shape and influence one another (cf. *The Location of Culture*). Indeed, colonizer and colonized mutually influence one another (Ponzanesi 98), rendering agency a fluid concept associated with both contextual and temporal changes of the U.S. imperial state as well as its domestic political landscape. Correspondingly, I aim to show that the U.S. imperial project in the territory of American Samoa is not just a matter of control and subjugation by an imperial power, but that influence also flows “from areas of ‘weakness’ to those of ‘strength,’” that is, from the periphery “back to the ‘metropole’” (Gaddis 412). Ultimately, exposing the (unintended) effects of the way Samoans have exercised agency is integral for our understanding of the way efforts for transformative political, legal, and social change are animated within the American imperial state.



By bringing the discourse on (the history of) American empire, a postcolonial approach to agency of the colonized, and the paradoxical consequences of the exercise of agency by American Samoans into conversation with one another, I draw attention to the impact of “empire at home” on the formation of the twenty-first-century American imperial state. Indeed, as Alyosha Goldstein has argued in his introduction to the edited volume *Formations of United States Colonialism*, “for all the recent talk and analysis of empire [...] the particular historical conditions of colonialism, and their complex persistence and ongoing reconfiguration in North America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific [over which a formal American empire stretches], have rarely been placed at the center of current mainstream debates” (11). This, he argues, stands in stark contrast with the pro-imperialist/anti-imperialist debate that took place a century earlier in which “the historical specificities of U.S. continental colonialism” were explicitly foregrounded “as a condition through which to address overseas expansion in the wake of the 1898 Treaty of Paris” (11). Similar to the way in which continental colonization served as mode and model for the formation of the American imperial state in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the acquisition of overseas, insular territories has been foundational for the formation of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century American state. Correspondingly, the history of Samoan colonization is constitutive of the history of the United States more generally, a history that renders the analytic category of the “imperial” with regard to the employment of Samoan agency as indispensable. In other words, this thesis shows that understanding the United States as well as its politics fully requires the understanding of American Samoa and its place within the American imperial state.

I approach the trialectic of American empire, agency of the colonized, and the case of American Samoa via a discussion of three key aspects that I regard as foundational to that trialectic: “territory,” “exceptionalism,” and “cultural violence.” The three concepts offer an

alternative approach to the discussion of over 150 years of American imperial history in the Samoan archipelago. Covering everything is simply not within the scope of this thesis. This approach, however, does restrict my analysis of agency somewhat: epistemologically, the distribution of knowledge regarding “territory” and “exceptionalism,” in particular, as well as the practices that they have brought along, have operated predominantly at the level of the metropole. Yet, as my inquiry of agency via these concepts shows, perhaps less so for “territory” (Chapter 2), but certainly so for “exceptionalism” (Chapter 3) and “cultural violence” (Chapter 4), they have also been significantly operational at the level of the periphery, through appropriation, hybridization, resistance, and cooperation, and therefore have not only been foundational to American empire but also to Samoan agency.

Accordingly, whereas my discussion of territory links practices of imperialism to restrictions on the capacity for Samoan agency, the analysis of exceptionalism and cultural violence shows how agency can alternatively be found in practices of daily life that operate at the interstices of power and provide for sites of agency separate from, as well as in collaboration with, the dominant power of the state. The three key concepts thus offer a discursive framework for the mutually influential relationship between colonizer and colonized that is sufficiently representative for the larger narrative of the agency of Samoans in the American empire and shows how that agency ultimately cut through practices of imperialism as a double-edged knife, subverting and upholding them at the same time.

#### CASE STUDY: AMERICAN SAMOA

The choice to focus on agency in relation to American Samoa is for carefully selected reasons. Firstly, American Samoa is exclusive among the permanently inhabited U.S. territories as unincorporated, unorganized territory. Whereas other territories are also unincorporated, they have been organized by organic acts which offer their residents more

rights akin to those offered by the U.S. Constitution.<sup>7</sup> For instance, Puerto Rico was organized by the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917, which granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship as well as established a Puerto Rican bill of rights. American Samoa knows no such act and therefore its residents do not hold U.S. citizenship. Although American Samoa has a ratified Constitution that includes a bill of rights, both differ substantially from their U.S. counterparts. The lack of citizenship offers a second reason for discussing American Samoa; American Samoans are U.S. nationals, not U.S. citizens.<sup>8</sup> Effectively, this means they are restricted in terms of migration movement and cannot hold civil servant jobs outside of their territory, such as those of police officer or public school teacher.<sup>9</sup> They are the only ones born on American soil who obtain this status, making them perhaps the most disenfranchised political agents within the American political system today.

This is not to say that American Samoans have faced the worst of American imperialist practices, however, particularly not in terms of displacement, federal land grabs, and erasure of local cultures and identities. The Chamorro people of Guam, for instance, have seen some twenty-nine percent of their land, that is, nearly a third of the island, fall into the hands of the United States military (Herman 644–45) and have needed to negotiate a Chamorro identity in light of increasing Americanization and militarization (Perez 572; Warheit n.p.). Likewise, the fabric of Hawaiian society changed dramatically after the United States annexed it as territory, and the erasure of local culture only accelerated after it gained

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<sup>7</sup> The United States has also obtained several uninhabited small islands, mostly in the Pacific, which are all unincorporated with the exception of Palmyra Atoll. None of these islands are organized because there are no permanent residents.

<sup>8</sup> Today, American Samoans are the last of U.S. nationals, a status that in the early- and mid-twentieth century was applicable to residents of territories that were yet to be organized, which included the Philippines when it was under American rule.

<sup>9</sup> The latter has led to several legal cases, most recently *Tuaua v. United States*, filed in 2012, in which American Samoan plaintiffs sued for U.S. citizenship but were denied those rights on the grounds of the non-applicability of the Fourteenth Amendment, justified by the argument of American Samoans' rights to political self-determination. See Van der Elsen, pages 45–47, for a more elaborate discussion of this case.

statehood in 1959 (Yeung 30).<sup>10</sup> American Samoa, by contrast, has ratified a constitution that protects its local culture, the *fa'asāmoa*, often translated as “the Samoan way,” including the traditional Samoan chiefly system, the *fa'amatai*, as well as Samoan ancestry qualifications for land possession, which is approximately ninety percent owned collectively by the *āigapotopoto*, or extended families. This system of sharing is based on *fa'aaloalo* (respect), in which *matai* (chiefs) meet in *fono*'s (village or district meetings) and exercise *pule* (authority) with regard to land and resources, while others in the family provide *tautua* (service) to the *matai* and *āiga* (Uperesa and Garriga-López 50). The *fa'asāmoa* is not only based on ideas of mutual respect and sharing among the *āigapotopoto* but also “influences every aspect of the socioeconomic fabric of the Territory” (United Nations, “Special Committee” 11). Ironically, it is precisely American Samoa's disenfranchised legal and political status as unincorporated, unorganized territory that protects its indigenous culture, its constitution, its collective land ownership practices, and its traditional chiefly system in ways that full legal integration into the American liberal, democratic system would not—a political and legal position that I have elsewhere termed American Samoa's “paradox of liminality” (Van der Elsen 38). This paradox of liminality creates clear tensions between conditions of subjugation and protection, which makes for a third compelling reason for selecting American Samoa as topic of inquiry with regard to agency of disenfranchised territorial inhabitants of American empire.

Finally, whether American Samoa should properly be called an American colony has been disputed for quite some time (Uperesa 207), rendering the concept of American Samoan agency a heterogenous one that contributes to the perpetuation of American imperialist practices on the archipelago. More specifically, American Samoa is one of only six territories in the Pacific that remains on the United Nations List of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

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<sup>10</sup> In addition, American Samoa is far from the largest territory, both in terms of population and landmass. With only a little over 55,000 inhabitants and a land area of some 200 square kilometers it is the second to smallest. Puerto Rico, the largest unincorporated U.S. territory, by comparison, has over 8,800 square kilometers of landmass with some 3.7 million inhabitants (U.S. Census 2010).

Whereas the larger group of Pacific island polities has moved towards independence, as is the case for (Western) Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands, or entered into free association with an independent state (sometimes the former administering power), such as the Federated States of Micronesia and the Marshall Islands, who are both associated to the United States, American Samoa has, from a legal perspective, remained something akin to a colony of the United States based on political agreements that have remained virtually unaltered for the past 120 years. Yet, American Samoans have emphasized time and again the benevolence of their relationship with the United States: “we, the people of American Samoa, do not consider ourselves a *colonized people*,” proclaimed Attorney General Talauega Eleasalo Ale of American Samoa at a recent U.N. decolonization seminar (qtd. in Sagapolutele, “American Samoa” n.p., original emphasis). “We do not live under a regime for which colonization must be eradicated,” he continued, and added that “as a territory of the United States, we enjoy the protection of the most powerful country in the world” (qtd. in Sagapolutele, “American Samoa” n.p.). Ale referred to the 1900 and 1904 Deeds of Cession as a voluntary transfer of sovereignty and reminded his listeners that no war or bloodshed had taken place between the United States and American Samoa. Although the Samoan government’s official stance towards its status as territory does not represent the views of all American Samoans, it provides important insight into the agency that American Samoans exercise with regard to keeping the current political status quo in place. More so, American Samoan dividedness on the issue of decolonization or full legal integration into the U.S. shows that agency of territorial subjects is not homogenous. Rather, it is negotiated not only in relation to the administering power but also to internal political differences and struggles, complicating collective agency of Samoans towards improvement of their political disenfranchisement even further.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN SAMOA IN THE AMERICAN EMPIRE

Despite American Samoa's peculiar status within the American empire, surprisingly little has been written about Samoa in the American imperial context. When studies of American empire include coverage of the territories, they tend to focus on the larger territories, such as Puerto Rico or the former territory of the Philippines. For instance, Daniel Immerwahr's recently published *How to Hide an Empire* makes a few mentions of American Samoa, particularly in relation to its absence from early twentieth-century discourse on empire, but continues that absence by not treating American Samoa as significant case, while devoting several full chapters to U.S. imperial history of both the Philippines and Puerto Rico. Other studies, such as David Brody's *Visualizing American Empire* and Alfred McCoy's *Policing America's Empire*, although offering compelling insights into the formations of American empire and the lasting effects of imperialist practices on today's surveillance state, focus predominantly on the colonial history of the Philippines. In the same category, Julian Go's *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning* offers a comparative history of American authorities' use of "culture" as lessons in self-government to foster cultural accommodation and transformation among a colonial elite in the Philippines and Puerto Rico, but does not cover this topic for the smaller island territories. Similarly, Alfred McCoy and Francisco Scarano's promising edited volume *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, which offers a more "holistic approach" with several contributions focusing on the formations, structures, and configurations of empire in the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico from the perspective "of the periphery instead of the core" (6–8), neglects the smaller island territories with only a few mentions of American Samoa. This is remarkable because the final contribution by Ian Tyrrell recognizes that little scholarship has been done "on the actual ruling of the formal empire and on the interconnections between the various parts of that empire: Puerto Rico, Samoa, Guam, the Philippines, and the Virgin Islands"

(550). Yet, the call for more scholarship on the effects of empire at home in the form of continental colonization, particularly in relation to the smaller island territories, remains unanswered even in this voluminous work on empire.

Other studies do not allocate attention to the U.S. territories at all, but choose to treat the American empire as one sovereign entity, one imperial power, which fosters a debate of empire on a global (balance of power) scale while focusing on outward American expansion as well as offering a comparative perspective to previous empires. For instance, Charles Maier's seminal study entitled *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* places the United States in a larger context of global empires, inquiring how the category of "empire" and its structure and impact apply to the United States. His comparative history draws long parallels to previous empires, such as the Roman, the Ottoman, the Spanish, and the British, among others, but does not thoroughly include how past imperialist practices have contributed to an inequality of power relations within a formal American empire. Similarly, A. G. Hopkins recent publication *American Empire: A Global History*, although paying some attention to U.S. territories, places the history of American empire within a larger, centuries-old process of globalization, in which the British empire is offered as both foundation of and as comparative counterpart to the American empire. American Samoa, as well as Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands receive little attention, however, and are reduced to examples that serve the function of buttressing the overarching argument of the interconnections between globalization and the formations of empire. In a way, these studies of American empire mirror the domestic imperialism of the United States by designating the smaller insular territories to the periphery of their examinations.

Yet, whereas historical studies of American empire tend to neglect the smaller U.S. territories, and in particular American Samoa, other studies have recognized their significance to American history as well as to the American imperial present. In particular, the field of

anthropology has produced a rich body of work, specifically on the formations of colonialism, which Benita Parry called “the most spectacular mode of imperialism’s many and mutable states” (34). For instance, the late Karen Armstrong has emphasized in her publication “American Exceptionalism in American Samoa” how colonialism and American exceptionalism were internalized and appropriated to fit Samoan customs as well as used to create distinctions between those who accepted and those who resisted American rule. Similarly, Fa‘anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa has examined how American football “illustrates the evolution of structures of opportunity,” embedded in nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperialist practices, within which Samoans “have increasingly moved transnationally to the United States as part of new (raced, gendered, classed) labor routes” (207–208). Uperesa’s work draws specific attention to how “spectacles of mobility and prosperity” pull American Samoa into the “geopolitical circuits of U.S. empire” (Goldstein 24).

Part of Uperesa’s work is published in the previously mentioned *Formations of U.S. Colonialism*, which argues for the significance of domestic colonialism as an analytic framework for understanding the contemporary United States. The volume, edited by Alyosha Goldstein, draws attention to the neglect of “important recent effort[s]” in the study of empire to “substantially include continental colonization and conquest within its frame of inquiry,” particularly in relation to the insular territories (11). By examining the quality of agency of American Samoans within the American imperial state, I aim to counter the neglect that Goldstein identifies and bring into conversation with one another a postcolonial understanding of agency, the case study of American Samoa, and the imperial as analytic category for American political practices. Ultimately, I use the case of American Samoa as a way to draw attention to the (unintended) effects of the exercise of agency within the American imperial state, which not only renders agency a double-edged sword that both undermines and keeps in place the imperial status quo but also invites a rethinking of how social, political, and legal



change is animated by those on the periphery of that imperial state. The periphery is, after all, as much a part of the state as is the metropole, and the history of American Samoa is as much a part of American history as is its continental counterpart.

#### RESEARCH METHOD AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

The four chapters that make up this thesis offer a qualitative analysis of a number of primary sources in the form of a close reading of legal cases, newspaper and magazine articles, photographs, and documentaries, as well as secondary sources, to expose how Samoan agency can be regarded as constitutive of the American imperial state, even while Samoans attempted to resist imperialist practices. Chapter 1 outlines more elaborately the causes for the continued disenfranchisement of U.S.-territorial residents and the imperial amnesia that haunts them.

These causes provide for the underlying qualifications for agentic capacity of American Samoans (and other territorial residents) as well as the theoretical underpinnings for agency within the American imperial state more generally. The chapter also offers a definition of the imperial state as an ambiguous apparatus characterized by the struggle for power by various social groups, in which the predominant influence may lie with a state nobility but in which influence by other actors can alternatively be found in other sites of meaning-making, that is, in practices of everyday life.

The three chapters that follow approach agency via the previously discussed concepts of “territory,” “exceptionalism,” and “cultural violence,” devoting a chapter to each. Chapter 2 focuses on “territory” and its relation to agency in the American imperial state. It sketches the historical context (ca. 1870s–1900s) of “unincorporation” that provides for the legal and political framework for governance of the territories, which imposes further restrictions on agency. Chapter 3 delves into how American Samoans have dealt with those restrictions via simultaneous resistance to and cooperation with imperialist practices (ca. 1890s–1950s) by

focusing on the “exceptional”—or rather, “provincial”—characteristics of American Samoa within the U.S. empire. The examples of the resistance movement *O le Mau* and the willing cooperation with imperialist practices of the *Fita Fita Guard and Band* provide early examples of how the exercise of agency operated as a double-edged sword. Chapter 4 (1950s–now) considers how practices of imperialism perpetuated into the twenty-first century and how they affect American Samoans in ways that can be characterized as culturally violent. By focusing on “cultural violence,” the chapter shows how direct and structural forms of violence are legitimized by presenting certain processes as natural and unchangeable social facts. This chapter, by way of coming full circle, sketches the specific, contemporary consequences of hegemonic political practices (as outlined in Chapter 1) for American Samoa, while showing how Samoan agency in both political matters as well as in practices of everyday life is driven to the ruts of life.

Ultimately, I show that American Samoan agency is a problematic, heterogenous, and multidirectional concept entrenched in imperial power relations that functions as a double-edged knife: it has been key to both changing *and* keeping in place American empire. Recognizing the consequences of the way Samoans have exercised agency heterogeneously and multidirectionally is integral to efforts for transformative political, legal, and social change within the American imperial state.

## CHAPTER 1— EMPIRE STATE OF MIND

### AGENCY AND THE STATE OF AMERICAN EMPIRE

A political climate of territorial disenfranchisement influenced by imperial amnesia, as briefly referred to in the introduction, severely restricts the agentic capacity of the people of American Samoa as well as of those residing in other insular U.S. territories. Therefore, this chapter outlines the contemporary, underlying qualifications for the agentic capacity of American Samoans within the American imperial state—qualifications that are in no minor way set by a state nobility that exercises large amounts of control over domestic politics. The first part of this chapter outlines four ways in which the hegemony, that is, the predominant influence on domestic politics, governs domestic American political practices with regard to empire: (1) “empire” as referring to informal spheres of influence, (2) “colonialism” as referring to white settler colonialism, (3) the pervasiveness of the doctrine of American exceptionalism, and (4) continued (institutionalized) racism.

Yet, empire is far from a totalitarian state and the state nobility does not have a monopoly on agency. Therefore, by relying on the works of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, this chapter also outlines how the American imperial state is construed and constructed as an ambiguous apparatus marked by tensions and conflicts between distinct social groups for various forms of capital (political, legal, cultural). Although the state nobility may have secured a predominant influence on determining and advancing the interests of society (i.e. hegemonic political practices), it has in no way secured a monopoly on those interests, as the invocation of agency of the colonized already implies. Agency of the colonized—that is, agency of the residents of U.S. territories and in particular of American Samoans—is located, then, at the interstices of power and in practices of everyday life, an

agentic arena separate and distinct from that of the state nobility and its hegemonic political practices.

#### THE PERVASIVENESS OF IMPERIAL AMNESIA IN HEGEMONIC POLITICAL PRACTICES

Recent geopolitical developments have renewed the urgency for analyzing the political agency of American Samoans, as well as their position as a Pacific island polity within the American empire. These political developments are captured partially by President Obama's address to the Australian Parliament in 2011, in which he proclaimed that "the United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation," (qtd. in Droessler, "Whose Pacific" 58). The "pivot to the Pacific," as Obama's strategic rebalancing of military bases to the Pacific was called, shows a renewed geopolitical interest in the Pacific region and Asia—a political interest that has not wavered since the Trump administration took office.<sup>1</sup> This geopolitical reorientation towards Asia, in part caused by a "rising China," not only put an end to a United Nations supervised phase of imperial contraction that followed post-WWII decolonization efforts, but also "returned the strategic imperative to Oceania," inviting anew questions of political self-determination of Pacific island polities (Pöllath 237). Particularly, "in this era of competition and cooperation between China and the US," Moritz Pöllath writes, "the unincorporated territories of American Samoa and Guam, as well as the CNMI and the states in free association with the United States, have to *negotiate* their political aspirations and economic development" (237, emphasis added)—a negotiation that continues to take place under a U.S. hegemony that imposes militarization to which non-sovereign territories can do little to resist. Precisely their non-sovereign status makes them "attractive and available to the US Department of Defense" (Nogues 21). It is not surprising then that the U.S. government's

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term "Pivot to the Pacific" was renounced by the Trump Administration, then-Acting Assistant Secretary of State Susan Thornton has affirmed that "We're going to remain engaged and active in Asia" (qtd. in Mehta).

“official” stance towards American Samoan decolonization eerily echoes the PRC’s stance on the China-Taiwan issue: they regard it as a matter of “internal concern” (United Nations, “Special Committee” 14).<sup>2</sup>

Increasing militarization in the Pacific territories as well as geopolitical interest in American Samoa and other Pacific island territories stand in stark contrast with the practices of imperial amnesia and territorial disenfranchisement that continue to pervade the domestic U.S. political landscape. The cause of this gap, as well as the cause for a more general paradox between the advocacy of liberal ideals of freedom, equality, and democracy abroad and the failed realization of these ideals at home, particularly with regard to the treatment of territorial residents, can be found in a combination of four permeating modes of thought, which have been upheld despite efforts by scholars, activists, and politicians alike to expose the imperial underpinnings of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Firstly, if the contemporary United States is recognized as an empire at all, it is often done so in metaphorical terms that in one way or another refer to an informal sphere of influence, drawing attention away from the territories that ostensibly do not categorize as disenfranchised because they are part of the hegemonic power. After the end of the Cold War, global power structures transformed immensely, leaving political scientists to debate over the proper term with which to describe the new world order that had emerged. “Hegemony” is what legal scholar Lea Brilmayer (cf. *American Hegemony: Political Morality in a One-*

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<sup>2</sup> Such bold statements are not uncommon in American imperial history; throughout the nineteenth century, the United States annexed numerous small guano islands in the Pacific Ocean as well as the Caribbean Sea and simply proclaimed them American territory and thus a matter of American jurisdiction henceforth (Immerwahr, *How to Hide* 53, 85). Guano (bird or bat excrement) was a vital fertilizer for nineteenth-century agriculture much-needed to keep up the food production with the rapidly expanding U.S. population. See also the 1856 Guano Islands Act.

<sup>3</sup> Although a large body of scholarship exists on American empire and the American territories, I cannot help but observe something of a parallel between the absence of the study of empire in relation to American territories in my own American Studies curriculum and the hegemonic political practice of imperial amnesia. If American empire was studied, it was done so in relation to informal spheres of influence in Europe (and beyond), but no attention was paid to domestic imperial practices and continental colonization in the U.S. territories. I do not believe this parallel is in any way informed by a political agenda, but I merely wish to point out how we have unconsciously contributed to keeping a hegemonic practice in place.

*Superpower World*) and political geographer John Agnew (cf. *Hegemony: The New Shape of Global Power*) called this new power structure. Others, such as Charles Krauthammer, preferred the term “unipolarity” (cf. “The Unipolar Moment”). Still others, such as David Lake, found that “hierarchy” best captured the contemporary geopolitical system (cf. *Entangling Relations*). The various interpretations of the new global order have contributed to a plethora of interpretations of empire, all linked by one commonality: the United States is discussed as an informal empire in geopolitical terms, whose sphere of influence is not restricted or determined by sovereign, national borders.

This has broadened the definition of empire, in the words of Charles Maier, to “an inequality of power resources and influence” (“An American Empire?” 1), to which Michael Ignatieff adds that empires “need not have colonies” but provide the structure of “the global order” (54). Although the categories of “formal” and “informal” have long been demonstrated to be fluent and overlapping, especially in an ever-globalizing world in which the meaning of sovereignty is rapidly changing (Kramer, “How Not to Write” 911), it should be mentioned that the expansion of the debate on empire—a debate that focuses predominantly on geopolitical interpretations of empire and the United States’ place in the world—draws away attention from the imperialist practices (whether it be formal or informal) at the domestic level. In particular, the racialized American practice of “intraterritorialization,” a term which legal scholar Kal Raustiala uses to define the practice of applying “distinct legal regimes” to “different areas within a sovereign state” (5), drives what Alyosha Goldstein has called “continental colonization,” which crystallizes in territories such as American Samoa to which the U.S. Constitution does not apply fully (11). Continued focus on geopolitical interpretations of empire, particularly those that still operate within a Westphalian, nationalist framework, draw the focus away from the U.S. territories as unincorporated, disenfranchised parts of an imperial power.

Secondly, in common discourse, when we speak of empire, words such as “colonials,” “American colonists,” “the colonial period,” and “colonial literature” generally do not refer to contemporary or historical U.S.-American political subjugation of or aggression against territorial-colonial subjects, but rather invoke “images of plucky settlers fleeing persecution in Europe, overthrowing their oppressive European rulers, establishing rich new states and cultures against all odds through hard work, and founding a free, democratic, and unified nation” (Kazanjian 49). Such a focus on early European settler colonialism reveals a “deeply nationalistic mythology that continues to thrive today”—a nationalistic mythology which, according to literary scholar David Kazanjian, holds that “the United States was founded exclusively on the just and noble principles of freedom, equality, and democracy, and it continues to spread those principles around the world” (49). Colonialism understood in this manner ignores the racial and imperial underpinnings as crystallized in continental expansion driven by the creed of Manifest Destiny and exceptionalist sentiments, effectively obscuring “the specificity of the violent displacement of indigenous people as the origin story for the nation” (Streeby 98). Indeed, a hegemonic understanding of America’s colonialism as referring to ostensibly benign, early settler colonialism has drawn attention away from present and past formal colonial practices in the United States territories—including the violent displacement of Native Americans from their land as well as the enslavement and internal colonization of African Americans—fostering a hegemonic political understanding of the “imperial” as a category no longer relevant to U.S. history (Immerwahr, “Writing the History” 402).

A third argument for the pervasiveness of imperial amnesia in hegemonic political practices is the continued acceptance of the doctrine of “American exceptionalism.” This doctrine can be defined as the “patriotic view that the United States had avoided Europe’s class conflicts, authoritarian governments, and empires,” and therefore is a unique and

distinctive nation, “special” and “better” than others, that is destined “to become ‘an example of liberty for others to emulate’” (McCoy, Scarano, and Johnson 8). It has produced a rich body of work that opposes it: John McCormick, for instance, refutes the idea that America is exceptional and argues that exceptionalist thinking leads to American arrogance (“American Exceptionalism” 204). Donald Pease, on the other hand, considers exceptionalism as a “state fantasy” that functions as “a double-edged process dividing the manifest organization of the U.S. role in the world with the latent fantasy whereby U.S. citizens imagined themselves as practicing nationalism through the disavowal of imperialism” (23). Stephen Waltz, as a final example, refutes any and all ideas associated with America as being exceptional as “myth” (n.p.). Yet, American exceptionalist thought has been and remains influential to political practices. In the past, American exceptionalism drove continental expansion, propelled by the misguided notion of Manifest Destiny, or the divinely ordained mission to occupy the American continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific, which was based on a sense of ideological superiority over racialized others. Although today that sense of racial superiority no longer dominates ideas of exceptionalism—a development that Obama has emphasized in multiple political speeches in which he proclaimed that “only in America” is his story possible, thus exceptionalizing how the U.S. supposedly overcame racism in a unique manner<sup>4</sup>—a different sense of superiority pervades nonetheless. This sense can instead be found in a glorification of American history, in which historical artifacts such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution become civil religious objects that uphold American values, referred to by former Speaker of the House and historian Newt Gingrich as “habits of liberty” (13). Such glorification easily transforms into justification, which happened in particular under the presidency of George W. Bush—and, as it appears, also in the presidency of Trump—in which exceptionalism was supplanted by

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<sup>4</sup> See Obama’s 2008 speech “A More Perfect Union,” available at <https://constitutioncenter.org/amoreperfectunion/>.



exemptionalism, or the American practice of “exempting itself from provisions of international legislation and treaties by explicit conditions, non-ratification, or simply noncompliance” (Tilborghs 9). Such exceptionalism and exemptionalism negatively mirrors the domestic practice of intraterritorialization, in which territories are “exempted” from the full benefits of American liberal democracy.

In addition, studies have shown the influence of exceptionalist thought on the development of the American imperial project. Julian Go, in particular, has demonstrated how early exceptionalist thinking influenced a denial of imperialist practices: “because of its anti-colonial tradition, democratic values, and liberal institutions, [the United States ostensibly] is not and has never been an empire” (Go, “Provinciality” 74). Go demonstrates how such imperial amnesia made its way into the Bush era, albeit in a transformed way, which he terms “liberal exceptionalism.” This transformed imperial amnesia did not deny American imperial projects altogether, but denied only the ugly aspects of it—a selective process that heralded the redeeming qualities of American empire, which should be characterized as “beneficent,” “selfless,” “benign,” and “benevolent” (Go, “Provinciality” 75). Liberal exceptionalism has perpetuated American imperialist practices under the guise of “democratic tutelage” projects, both in American territories, such as Puerto Rico and previously the Philippines, and in foreign nations ostensibly in need of guidance, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Go’s argument of the “provinciality” of these democratic tutelage projects, which he maintains can be found in the “specific features of and developments in the colonies themselves” (“Provinciality” 77), is particularly relevant for the case of American Samoa: despite a vehement advocacy for democratic tutelage in the territories, it was notably absent here, demonstrating a neglect towards Samoa that eerily echoes the contemporary neglect as opened with in the introduction of this thesis.

Finally, but certainly not least, both political and imperialist practices continue to be informed by racialized attitudes, and structural and institutionalized racism more generally (Shelby 340). Indeed, empire depends on keeping in place what Michelle Alexander—albeit in a different context but no less applicable here—has defined as an American “racial caste system” of white supremacy and dominance of Anglo-Saxon norms, which is propelled today by a “colorblind public consensus” (11). For the territories, specifically, this racial caste system, as well as the institutionalized racism that it brings forth, is crystallized in the continued upholding of the *Insular Cases*, which form the legal and political basis for the “doctrine of territorial unincorporation” that exempts territorial residents from the full benefits of American liberal democracy (Uperesa and Garriga-López 40). Ibram X. Kendi argues in his seminal study on the history of racist ideas that such “racially discriminatory policies have usually sprung from economic, political, and cultural self-interests” (9), self-interests which are not only constantly changing but which were also key factors in acquiring the insular territories in the first place (as Chapter 2 shows in more detail). Consequently, to keep colonial subjects at the receiving end of racist discrimination, race had to be something that ‘is,’ a biological determinant that would explain as well as justify the subjugation and dehumanization of ostensibly inferior people. It is not until the past few decades that race has largely been understood as “something that *does* something,” a social construct instead of a biological determinant (Lentin 2). However, the continued standing of the *Insular Cases* as “good law,” despite multiple legal challenges in court and despite numerous ethically questionable references to the infamous Dred Scott case, demonstrates the complexity of the problem as to how today’s society should deal with a fractured and ugly inheritance regarding race. Consequently, the covertness and deep-rootedness of discrimination against

disenfranchised territorial residents, to which race has historically been key, keep both empire and hegemonic political practices on a firm footing.<sup>5</sup>

#### THE AMERICAN IMPERIAL STATE AND THE LOCATION OF AGENCY

A focus on geopolitical interpretations of American empire and U.S. power in a global sphere of influence, a hegemonic understanding of America's colonialism as referring to benign, white settler colonialism, a perpetuation of the exceptionalist idea that the United States is special and uniquely suited to spread democracy to "underdeveloped" regions of the world, and a racialized attitude towards territorial residents continue to inform hegemonic political practices and foster an imperial amnesia that perpetuates the disenfranchised political position of U.S.-territorial residents. As a consequence, while perpetuating the disenfranchised political position of the subjects of the U.S. territories and severely constricting their capacity for agency, these four characteristics continue to form and define the "state" of empire, which, as this section shows, influences the location of agency for residents of the U.S. territories.

The word "state" is in quotation marks for a reason: it serves a double function. On the one hand, it refers to the current condition, a mode of being (i.e., the state) of American empire, upheld by the aforementioned practices; while, on the other hand, it refers to the state as a unified and distinct actor whose power can be located in what Michel Foucault called "governmentality." Foucault's well-known idea of governmentality, or government rationality, can be defined as the shaping, guiding, and affecting of the conduct of people<sup>6</sup>—or in short, the "conduct of conduct"—and helps understand how U.S.-territorial subjects are conditioned to operate politically, culturally, and socioeconomically within the American

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<sup>5</sup> I return to racism and the *Insular Cases* more elaborately in the next chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault identified three forms of power, which do not replace one another, but coexist. Foucault stressed the interplay between these three forms, which, in addition to "governmentality," are "sovereignty" and "discipline." Sovereignty identifies a form of power inextricably linked to territory, in which subjects' lives are the right of the sovereign ("to take life or let live"); Disciplinary power is exercised through the "[molding] of the soul of the criminal in modern penal institutions" (Ivarsson and Rud 9).

imperial state. Indeed, the hegemonic political practices as outlined above can be argued to conduct the conduct of American Samoans and, thus, significantly influence their agentic capacity. However, although I call the practices as outlined above “hegemonic,” that is, they constitute the predominant influence on domestic politics regarding territories, I have also stressed that circuits of knowledge are not a one-way street from hegemony to areas of weakness nor from state to subject. Therefore, these practices should not be regarded as totalitarian; after all, the (imperial) state is not an omnipresent, totalitarian institution. Correspondingly, hegemonic political practices do not represent the views of all, but stand in relation to resistance to these practices—even if that resistance is articulated seemingly inconsequentially, such as Delegate Faleomavaea’s collected response to his non-recognition that this thesis opened with—signaling a diffusion of power which is a fundamental aspect of liberal democracy. Therefore, Foucault’s interpretation of the state as a distinct unit of power, although certainly relevant regarding its explanation of the conduct of conduct, invites a more refined approach as to what comprises that state.

I argue in line with Pierre Bourdieu’s criticism of Foucault that the state should rather be regarded as “a bureaucratic field marked by struggles between different groups for various forms of capital (symbolic, cultural, and social as well as economic)” (Ivarsson and Rud 5). In the imperial state, more specifically, this translates to dominance that is based on both coercion and persuasion, but one that is also marked by the agency of those of inferior status in the form of resistance and collaboration, among other forms (Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony* 3). This invites an analysis of the structures and mechanisms that produce conditions of power, which in addition to the state can be found in the “distinct characteristics of those whom empire aims to rule,” as Julian Go has emphasized (“Provinciality” 77). Following Go’s line of thought and ideas presented by Bourdieu, I stress an interpretation of the state—that is, the American imperial state—as an ambiguous apparatus that is “marked by

tensions and conflicts” in which a “state nobility” exercises a predominant influence “on defining and promoting the interests of society” (Ivarsson and Rud 5)—a state nobility whose interests I have hitherto defined as “hegemonic political practices.” Such an understanding of the state of empire consequently locates agency in “the order and meaning-generating practices that are helping to shape and preserve the impression of a social order consisting of [imperial] state and civil society” (Ivarsson and Rud 7), as well as in the practices of everyday life of different social groups, which manifest in forms of coercion and resistance as well as persuasion and appropriation (Chappell 219; Guha 3).

In other words, agency of the colonized within the imperial state is located at the *interstices of power*. Such an understanding of agency renders the analysis of it in itself a turn away from the American imperial state as bureaucratic apparatus of power towards an understanding of the American imperial state as an effect of *practices of everyday life* that organize and are organized by people and space. Indeed, as Ivarsson and Rud write, “one can say that it is the local (order-creating) practices and the thickening of these which constitute the state’s existence, not the other way around” (7)—a claim analyzed meticulously in the final two chapters when I discuss *how* American Samoan agency is also constitutive of and perpetuating the state of American empire. Indeed, it follows that the state built by these practices is an “open field with multiple boundaries” (Ivarsson and Rud 7), rendering the negotiation of agency within that state a heterogenous, multidirectional venture, in which self-interest colludes and collides with collective interest.

Finally, what drives the heterogenous, multidirectional agency of subjects of the U.S. territories such as American Samoa, one might ask, especially when it is argued to contribute to a perpetuation of imperialist practices? In her ethnographic research on Sulawesi inhabitants in light of the problematic Dutch imperial history that haunts the island, Tania Murray Li draws attention to the ever-persistent “will to improve” of the Sulawesi people.

This will to improve—a will Murray Li locates in the inevitable gap between an innate desire to improve the human (colonial) condition and the subsequent failure to accomplish it fully—is “stubborn” even in face of repeated failure (“we still have to do something, we can’t just give up,” Murray Li quotes from a Sulawesi villager) (2). Although today challenges to improve are frequently framed in the language of “unkept promises” or in “language of rights” ordered by national and transnational law, “concepts of right are also embedded in commonsense notions that have, in Kirstie McClure’s words ‘more to do with felt sensation, with embodied perception of injury or abuse’” (Murray Li 2). This “felt sensation,” the experience, both individual and collective, of not being able to sustain one’s own life fully, is what drives the will to act, the will to improve, and, I add, is what motivates agency in the face of continued political disenfranchisement. As the following chapters show, this stubborn, pervasive will to improve can also be found in American Samoans, in their repeated challenges in court for full legal integration into American liberal democracy, in their appropriation as well as internalization of American idea(l)s of exceptionalism, in their non-violent resistance to these ideas, and, finally, in their selective acceptance of them, in which agency and the will to improve are driven to the ruts of life.

## CHAPTER 2—EMPIRE IN THE MAKING

### TERRITORY, LAW, AND THE IMPEDIMENT OF AGENCY IN THE AMERICAN EMPIRE

“Territory” might well be the single most ambiguous word that characterizes American empire. In common discourse it refers to organized land under jurisdiction of a state. In the U.S.-American context, it has additional legal and political denotations, which have been altered throughout history several times, with each altercation adding another layer of ambiguity to it. More specifically, its legal adjectival conjugations—which are “incorporated” and “unincorporated,” “organized” and “unorganized”—have added a complexity to this single word that renders it nearly synecdochical for the tale of American empire. Therefore, this chapter traces how “territory” and its multiple political and legal configurations throughout American history relate to the imperial project in American Samoa as well as to an impediment of agency of Samoan actors within that imperial project.

I do so by first giving a brief introduction to the concept of “territory” in the American political context, which I link to the historical context of U.S. expansionism in the Pacific, and finally to the problematic annexation of American Samoa. I then proceed by offering an analysis of a selection of legal cases, drawn from a group known collectively as the *Insular Cases*, which are foundational for the legal designation of the territory of American Samoa as “unincorporated.” What this chapter ultimately shows is how the ambiguous status of “territory” has contributed to the impediment of equal and reciprocal political relations between the United States and American Samoa, and how agency of American Samoans was restricted considerably by geopolitical and U.S. domestic developments in the years leading up to and right after annexation of the territory.

## FROM “TERRITORY” TO EMPIRE: U.S. EXPANSIONISM AND THE PACIFIC REGION

Today, the political term “territory” is most commonly used to denote those parts of the United States that are not states; that is, those parts of the United States that are not incorporated into the union fully. As such, the term implies a legal distinction between states and its citizens, on the one hand, and the U.S. nationals and citizens of the territories, on the other. The latter, however, is not a homogenous group of disenfranchised citizens. The territories are geographically scattered across the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea and their populations have developed distinct cultural traditions and speak different languages. In addition, legal and political distinctions from the mainland U.S. citizens, as well as distinction between territories, is dependent on and denoted by legal adjectival conjugations of the term “territory,” which divide it into three active categories: (1) unincorporated, organized territory, of which the U.S. currently holds four, which are all inhabited by a permanent, non-military population (Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands); (2) unincorporated, unorganized territory, of which the U.S. counts eleven within its borders with American Samoa as the only permanently inhabited one; and (3) incorporated, unorganized territory, which currently is a status exclusive to the uninhabited Palmyra Atoll. Together, the territories are home to some 4.1 million people who nearly all are racial or ethnic minorities (U.S. Census 2010).<sup>1</sup>

In the case of American Samoa, the relatively small population of approximately 55.000 predominantly consists of Samoans, a Polynesian ethnic group native to the Samoan islands. Similar to other U.S. territories, only those rights of the U.S. Constitution that are deemed “fundamental” apply to it, making clear distinctions between American Samoans and

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that multiple sources estimate the current population of the territories significantly lower than 4.1 million, at some 3.2 million. The exact number remains obscure, but the decrease of the population is generally attributed to migration to the mainland due to economic recession and high unemployment as well as a lack of access to proper health care in the territories (see: <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/united-states-territories/>).



other territorial residents, on the one hand, and the U.S. mainland and its citizens for who the Constitution not only serves as a founding national document but also has attained a certain “sacred,” civil religious status, on the other. American Samoans are further separated from citizens of the mainland as well as from citizens of the other territories by the status of U.S. national (instead of American citizenship).<sup>2</sup> In this sense, current legal and political usage of the term “territory” as it applies to American Samoa separates it—or perhaps segregates it, as I show later in this chapter—from other Americans.

Not coincidentally, the territories are the parts of the United States that are frequently left out of any visualization of geographical maps of the nation, separating them further from the mainland in popular imaginations of the nation. The current American territories are all geographically separated from the contiguous landmass that Benedict Anderson would refer to as the “logo-map” of the United States (176).<sup>3</sup> This logo-map—one that displays the mainland, contiguous part of the United States as representative of *all* of the United States—differs substantially from the United States’ actual map, which would also include a plethora of small specks that represent the island territories, both in the Caribbean and the Pacific, as well as U.S. military bases and U.S. embassies (these are also American “territory,” after all).<sup>4</sup> Following Anderson, maps are not merely objects that offer a scientific abstraction of spatial reality, but should be treated as normative objects that construct the very spatial realities that they portray (173). Therefore, while contributing to an “imagined community” among mainlanders, the exclusion of territories from national maps reinforces the liminal legal and political status that territories hold within the United States as well as within popular

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<sup>2</sup> American Samoans may obtain citizenship at birth if one of their parents is a U.S. citizen or if they are born to Samoan parents on the U.S. mainland.

<sup>3</sup> See also Daniel Immerwahr’s *How to Hide an Empire* for this interpretation of the logo-map, pages 8–19.

<sup>4</sup> In the early twentieth century, this “actual” map would also include territories such as the Panama Canal Zone (which was leased), Cuba (which was a U.S. protectorate), and the Philippines (acquired when defeating Spain in the Spanish-American war), among many others.

imaginations of the nation. “Territory” has come to invoke separate geographical locations over which the United States holds claim, but which are not regarded as fully “American.”

The way we use the term “territory” today, although in itself ambiguous, differs substantially from the way it was used in the past. Although during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an era of massive territorial expansion across the continent and beyond, the word “territory” was also used to refer to what might be called the “unincorporated parts” of the United States (like it is today), “territory” connoted something different as well: it evoked the prospect of statehood. Essentially, the vast continental landmasses that comprised territories such as the Louisiana Territory/ Missouri Territory or the Territory of Oregon, among others, could all be regarded as another category of territory, organized and incorporated,<sup>5</sup> because eventually they all joined the union as states. It is not until the end of the nineteenth century when the United States obtained overseas territory for the first time—that is, territory geographically separated from the contiguous mainland—that the prospect of statehood became disconnected from territory. For a brief moment, at the time of acquisition of these overseas territories, the contemporary vocabulary for these possession gave away what they really were; “colony” is what both Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson called them (Immerwahr, *How to Hide* 7). However, it did not take long for the imperialist connotations of “colony” to become incompatible with the American foreign relations agenda and the non-imperialist rhetoric of the time. As one officer of the Bureau of Insular Affairs (BIA)—the federal office commissioned with the organization of these new U.S. territories—warned in 1914: “the word colony must not be used to express the relationship which exists between our government and its dependent peoples” (qtd. in McKenna 110). The term “colony” was quickly replaced by the term “territory,” partially hiding the true nature of the

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<sup>5</sup> The distinction between incorporated and unincorporated was not articulated until the twentieth-century *Insular Cases* (which are discussed further into this chapter), which effectively makes this fourth category—although it does further the purpose of retrospectively distinguishing between territories that became states and territories that have not (yet) gained statehood—a superfluous one.

political relation to these dependents, yet fully disconnecting territory from the prospect of statehood.

“Territory,” therefore, is a concept inextricably intertwined with American practices of imperialism. The word implies both continuity and discontinuity between the acquisition of massive tracts of land, through purchasing as well as conquering and appropriation, that underlies eighteenth- and nineteenth-century continental expansion, on the one hand, and the overseas, supposed “accidental” acquisition of insular territories in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, on the other hand. Indeed, Thomas McCormick, one of the “core members” of the so-called Wisconsin School of diplomatic history, affirmed such simultaneous continuity and discontinuity when he maintained “that the United States has always been an empire but one that dramatically mutated in the 1890s and thereafter” into what he calls “a new empire, a second empire” (“From Old Empire to New” 64). The “first empire,” according to McCormick, came into being primarily through acquisition of territory by farmers and entrepreneurs, who kept expanding across the continent, both westward and southward, to acquire new seaports, such as New Orleans, San Francisco, and Seattle, which eventually gave them new routes of reaching European and Asian commercial markets for their produce and products. Yet, he explicates, this expansion of territory was preordained by “conscious foreign policy choices often made well in advance of American settlement,” such as Thomas Jefferson’s “Large Policy” of 1808, which anticipated a reduction, and finally an absorption, of the Spanish empire, or the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, which “left the United States free to interject its hegemony into the void” of “self-denying ordinance” in the Western Hemisphere (64–65). Indeed, this first empire may have begun with the American Revolution, itself “an imagined anti-imperial tradition” (Tyrrell and Sexton 7), but ended with an “imperial shopping list” for territory across the continent and beyond (McCormick 64).

Much like territorial expansion of this first empire was preordained by conscious policy choices and driven by economic expansion and ideological fervor, the “second empire” that followed in the wake of the Spanish-American War was certainly no accident either. Rather, it was the outcome of three decades of attempts to push outwards further across the American continent—attempts to the north were finally thwarted when Canada became a dominion in 1867, while attempts to the south were impeded by racial bias and financial interests to avoid further conflict with Mexico—as well as three decades of domestic developments in a Gilded Age of massive economic growth, fiscal centralization, navy-building, and a renewed national ideology (Green 74). More specifically, this new phase of imperial expansion meant the acquisition of territory removed from the contiguous, continental United States, certainly no small step (literally and figuratively) that was heavily contested in a “Great Debate” between pro-imperialists and anti-imperialists,<sup>6</sup> which for the larger part was driven by the faulty belief that economic expansion was “*essential* for the survival of liberal capitalism in America” (McCormick 69, original emphasis). The dominant economic theory of the day stipulated that “industrial overproduction, a structural surplus of supply over demand that depressed the rate of profit,” and “new technologies and increased mechanization” were the cause of the Long Depression and its three financial panics of 1873, 1884, and 1893. Repetition, according to this theory, could be prevented from happening again only by securing foreign markets (McCormick 69).<sup>7</sup> Instead of offering those new markets, however, overseas territory, particularly in the Pacific region, rather served as

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<sup>6</sup> This “Great Debate,” McCormick explains, was ultimately won by a third group that compromised between pro- and anti-imperialist arguments based on pragmatics: an empire was necessary for economic expansion and to secure dominance in the Pacific, these pragmatists reasoned, but direct colonies cost too much and alienated public opinion. Only when necessary should territory be acquired, abiding neatly, as McCormick notes, to an old British dictum: “Informal empire where possible [more] formal empire where necessary” (72). For a more comprehensive overview of the debate, see McCormick’s “From Old Empire to New,” pages 70–72.

<sup>7</sup> McCormick also notes that this theory, championed by “large manufacturers, trade associations, and probusiness economists,” ignored the true underlying causes for the Great Depression: “underconsumption, born of income redistribution upward, and the related fact that ‘capital [...] has accumulated faster than it can be profitably invested’” (69).

perfect stepping stones for access to the immense markets that lay beyond: China, Korea, and all of Asia.

Indeed, in this grand strategic vision of opening up new markets in Asia, the Pacific region played no minor role. The small islands that make up this region would serve as ideal coaling stations, telegraph posts, and even as military outposts that would secure American economic and political interests regionally. This vision of American dominance in the Pacific had been imagined since even before the American Civil War by powerful politicians such as William Henry Seward, who “had anticipated that commerce would bind the Pacific to the United States” (Green 77)—a prediction partially pushed to realization by his negotiation of the purchase of Alaska in 1867, which gave the U.S. control over the Aleutian Islands. In the years leading up to the Spanish-American War, the U.S. also claimed Midway Island under the Guano Act of 1856 and swallowed up whole the Hawaiian Islands, first by securing rights to a naval base at Pearl Harbor, next by quietly backing an uprising against the Hawaiian monarchy, and finally during the Spanish-American War and under imminent threat of Japanese invasion of the islands, U.S. Congress passed a joint resolution to formally annex the islands as the Territory of Hawaii. It is in light of these developments in the Pacific—the desire to expand economically, to secure stepping stones for trade with Asia, and to protect U.S. economic and political interests regionally and globally—that in 1872, U.S. Navy Commander Richard Meade of the *U.S.S. Narragansett* entered into negotiation with Chiefs of the Samoan Islands for the purpose of securing a coaling station in Pago Pago.

#### FROM SAMOA TO AMERICAN SAMOA: VOLUNTARY CESSION?

Pago Pago, located on the eastern island of Tutuila, attracted American attention because it holds, in the words of Sean Morrison, “one of the finest natural harbors in the world,” which would make for an excellent coaling station for an expanding American Navy (74). Moreover,

in the mid-1880s, the Samoan islands were the “only remaining neutral territory in Oceania” (J. Kennedy 39), meaning that if the United States was to expand across the Pacific, it was left with little choice as to where it would expand to. For these reasons, Commander Meade, although certainly not the first outsider to set foot on the islands—industrialists and traders (many of them German but also American and British) and missionaries (predominantly British and American) had been on the islands for the better part of the nineteenth century and the first Europeans said to have visited were Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen and his crew, who, dispatched by the Dutch East India Company, arrived in Samoa as early as 1722 (J. Kennedy 2)—sought to secure political foothold in Samoa and gained for the United States the exclusive right to establish a naval station on the archipelago.<sup>8</sup> What was particularly striking about this first agreement between Samoans and Americans, however, was that Commander Meade supposedly acted on his own. Thus, his authority could conveniently be denied by U.S. Congress, while the U.S. simultaneously gained exclusive access to Pago Pago (J. Kennedy 35). The agreement, although explicitly supported by expansionist President Ulysses S. Grant, depended, according to Congress, too much on conditions of protection against other imperial powers present on the Samoan islands at the time. Indeed, the U.S. sought no quarrel with the British and Germans who already had stakes in Samoa, so it never ratified the agreement (asbar.org), foreboding how insignificant Samoan involvement would be with regard to their political self-determination.

Yet, in the early years of American presence on the archipelago, Samoan sovereignty was still somewhat respected and it did not take long for Congress to turn a *de facto* agreement with Samoans into an official treaty. On January 17, 1878, Secretary of State William M. Evarts signed on behalf of U.S. Congress, who ratified the document in less than four weeks, a renewed agreement, conspicuously entitled the “Treaty of Friendship and

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<sup>8</sup> The U.S. also had a consul in Apia on the western island of Upolu, but the simultaneous presence of other foreign imperial powers did not give it any exclusive rights.

Commerce Between the United States and the Samoan Islands.” This treaty guaranteed the urgently-sought rights to Pago Pago, contained toned down promises of protection—article 5 states that “If, unhappily, any differences should have arisen, or shall hereafter arise, between the Samoan Government and any other Government in amity with the United States, the Government of the latter will employ its good offices for the purpose of adjusting those differences upon a satisfactory and solid foundation”—and guaranteed “perpetual peace and friendship between the Government of the United States and the Government of the Samoan Islands” (art. 1). Remarkable to note about this first official treaty is that it was the only time that Samoans would be treated as a sovereign political entity on equal footing with the United States. Hereafter, any and all treaties negotiated over the fate of the Samoan islands were marked by one commonality: they excluded Samoans from the negotiation table.

The exclusion of Samoans in negotiations was bolstered by the misunderstanding and non-recognition of the Samoan chiefly system, the *fa'amatai*, by the three imperial powers present on the islands. As the renowned western Samoan historian Malama Meleisea has noted, the *fa'asāmoa* and its practice of mutual ownership by the *āigapotopoto*, each headed by a *matai* who qualified for participation in the *fa'amatai*, stood in stark contrast to liberal ideas of private property as well as Euro-American forms of democratic governance, which led to a direct interference into Samoan domestic politics (105). To turn the Samoan system into something more recognizable for the Euro-American powers, they attempted to transform the Samoan title of “paramount chief,” of which the several islands had multiple ones, into a single European-style “puppet king” to represent Samoan interest (Chappell 220). Yet, they could not agree over who this king should be: the Germans backed Malietoa Laupepe of Savai'i, who they had given the title of “general,” while the Americans, as well as Samoans, preferred Mata'afa of the Atua district of Upolu (J. Kennedy 46). The backing of different suiters by different imperial as well as the longstanding rivalry between Malietoa and

Mata'afa exacerbated a fractionalization of Samoa as political entity, which only confirmed contemporary suspicion that, in the words of Sir Lionel Sackville-West, “the Samoan natives are incapable of forming, independently, a stable and efficient administration for preserving their own independence and for securing to each power full freedom of commerce, navigation and jurisdiction of all matters affecting their respective subjects and citizens” (qtd. in Ryden 351). The irony of Sackville-West's words were completely lost on him, as well as on those attending the conference in Washington, D.C., in June 1887 where these words were spoken, which revolved around the “Samoan issue,” as Samoans had been perfectly capable of forming a stable and efficient administration that preserved their sovereignty for the better part of a few thousand years. It was not until the advent of whites into their society that this tradition ended.

The ongoing Samoan rivalries, exacerbated by the presence of multiple imperial powers, led to several battles, which eventually killed twenty German Blue Jackets (J. Kennedy 46). Amidst growing tensions, especially between Germans and Americans who had not come to satisfactory conclusions at the conference in Washington—tensions that in no small way were intensified by the increased coverage of events by several American newspapers who, now that “whites” had died and American property was damaged, started paying attention to the Samoan situation—U.S. Congress allocated funds to build the long-awaited coaling station at Pago Pago (\$100,000 dollars would be spend on the harbor, another \$500,000 for the protection of American property) (J. Kennedy 47). Yet, the Germans saw this act as the final straw of aggression, as the money, although in no way officially annexing Tutuila, drew the eastern islands of Samoa closer to becoming a U.S. territory. Tensions escalated further, war between the imperial powers was imminent, and warships began to fill Apia harbor on the northern coast of the island of Upolu: the Americans sent the *Nipsic*, *Vandalia*, and *Trenton*, backed by the British *Calliope*; the Germans lined the *Adler*, *Eber*,



and *Olga* (Stevenson 113). Then, by way of divine intervention, before the situation could fully explode, a large cyclone razed over the islands, sinking or severely damaging nearly all the ships, leading the imperial powers to grudgingly return to the negotiation tables, this time in Berlin.

The Treaty of Berlin that followed out of these 1889 negotiations established what Holger Droessler has called a “tridominium” over the Samoan islands (“Colonialism by Deferral” 204). Derived from the Latin “condominium,” meaning shared ownership, the tridominium offered a temporary solution to the problem as to who would rule over Samoa. However, the talks that led to the Treaty in no way disguised the true sentiment of the day. In the words of U.S. Secretary of State Thomas F. Bayard, the Samoan islands were “a remote and feeble community of semi-civilized people” and it was “the duty of the powerful nations of Christendom to deal with these people in a spirit of magnanimity and benevolence” (Ryden 425). The ultimate low light of the Treaty and its negotiations, however, were not the sentiments as expressed by Bayard, nor the fact that no Samoan was invited to the table to hear them or that the Treaty was never translated into Samoan (Droessler, “Colonialism by Deferral” 210), but rather, in the most aggressive interference into Samoan domestic politics so far, the “General Act of 1889” (which followed out of the Treaty of Berlin) reinstated Malietoa as king, fully usurping Samoans’ right to choose who would fill this position—a position that had been created by imperialist powers in the first place. Indeed, as a contemporary *Blackwood’s Magazine* article entitled “The Samoan Agreement in Plain English” declared of the tridominium, it was “one of the most fatuous schemes ever devised for governing a country” (Thompson n.p.).

Finally, when in 1899 the tridominium failed, which can be attributed in part to the bureaucratic nightmare of putting one colonial subject under “ownership” of three imperial powers in an era of expansion, war, and competition, as well as to continued internal

struggles, both by Samoans amongst each other and in resistance to imperial presences—in which eventually more white troops lost their lives, with Americans among the casualties—Britain withdrew from Samoa altogether (J. Kennedy 50). In return for possession over the western islands, the Germans relinquished their rights in Tonga and part of the Solomon Islands as well as diverted the neutral zone in West Africa, Togo, and Zanzibar, while the Americans, with nothing to offer in return, stubbornly clung to the eastern islands of Samoa on which the construction of Pago Pago Harbor was well underway. The new agreements were formally signed in Washington on 2 December, 1899. Both the date and the agreement are important to note because they sealed the fates of Samoans, “who without their participation, knowledge, or consent, now had their islands divided among foreigners” and their future was from this day forward “to be dictated by distant authorities” (J. Kennedy 52). The official Deed of Cession of Tuituila and Aunu‘u (1900) and the consecutive Deed of Cession of Manu‘a (1904) that followed de facto annexation of these eastern islands by the United States can under the circumstances hardly be called a peaceful or willing transition of sovereignty.

Indeed, the repeated claims by the current American Samoan government that Samoans had full agency in ceding their sovereignty to the United States and that this cession was fully voluntary, most recently reiterated at a U.N. decolonization seminar by Attorney General Talauega Eleasalo Ale in 2018 (as quoted in the introduction of this thesis), is severely pulled into question by the geopolitical developments of the final two decades of the nineteenth century. In addition, Attorney General Ale’s words lose quite some gravity when one considers American intentions as articulated by Navy Commander B. F. Tilley, negotiator of the Deeds and the first “naval governor” of the territory that would hereafter be called American Samoa, who told the paramount chief of Manu‘a: “whether you come or not, the authority of the United States is already proclaimed over this island” (qtd. in Morrison 77).

Commander Tilley's assertion that the eastern Samoan islands were already under the authority of the U.S. is confirmed by the fact that Executive Order No. 125A, which imposed U.S. Naval control over these islands, was actually issued two months before the first Deed of Cession was signed by Samoan chiefs.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the Deeds of Cession largely served to officially recognize an already in place status quo. More so, to add insult to injury, Commander Tilley did not sign the Deeds and the American government did not ratify them until 1929 (see Ratification Act of 1929), further disrespecting Samoans' right to political self-determination as well as the integrity of Samoan chiefs, many of whom believed that they would be given U.S. citizenship in return for ceding their lands (Yeung 7). Whereas Samoans may continue to argue that they ceded willingly to the United States, particularly in comparison to the coercive nature of annexation of the territories obtained from Spain after its defeat in the Spanish-American War in 1898, they did so under circumstances that rendered that willingness inconsequential—circumstances that ultimately set the primary stage for unequal and non-reciprocal political relations between American Samoa and the federal United States government.

#### DOES THE CONSTITUTION FOLLOW THE FLAG? "TERRITORY" AND "UNINCORPORATION" IN THE *INSULAR CASES*

As the early-twentieth-century denial of equal and reciprocal political relations between Samoans and Americans implies, the shift "from continental expansion to overseas empire, from absorbing new territories into the domestic space of the nation to acquiring foreign colonies and protectorates abroad" (Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire* 2), brought with it a whole new set of question for politicians of the day to ponder over. In what way would these newly

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<sup>9</sup> Compare Executive Order No. 125-A, Placing Certain Islands of the Samoan Group Under the Control of the Navy Department, 19 February, 1900, with Tutuila Cession: Chiefs of Tutuila to United States Government, 17 April, 1900, at [www.asbar.org](http://www.asbar.org). See also Morrison for this observation (77).

acquired territories become part of the United States? How would the territories be governed? What rights would the people of these territories have? Should the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights apply to them? And would the people of these territories become American citizens? The answers to these questions can be found not in negotiations between Americans and representatives of the territories, but in a group of early twentieth-century Supreme Court rulings, known collectively as the *Insular Cases*. These rulings came to lay out the legal and political framework for the governance over the unincorporated U.S. territories, referred to by anthropologists Fa'anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa and Adriana María Garriga-López as the “doctrine of territorial unincorporation” (40), as well as offered the constitutional underpinnings for U.S. practices of imperialism in the territories, all without any consent by the people of the territories.

Into the canon of *Insular Cases* are usually included six decisions from 1901 and, retroactively, some fourteen to sixteen additional cases were added to the umbrella term, all of which were decided between 1901 and 1922, with the exception of *Torres v. Puerto Rico* (442 U.S. 465), which was decided in 1979. Of the earlier cases, *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901, 182 U.S. 244) is without a doubt the most significant one and is referred to by some as the “other *Plessy*,” implying that the case caused a type of segregation between territorial subjects and U.S. citizens of the mainland that is comparable to Jim Crow segregation of African Americans in the American South (Torruella 68). The case addressed the issue as to whether import duties applied to a shipment of oranges from the newly acquired territory of Puerto Rico to New York. Samuel Downes, the owner of S. B. Downes & Company, sued the New York customs officer George R. Bidwell, who forced him to pay import taxes, arguing that because Puerto Rico had become part of the United States the Uniformity Clause of the Constitution (art. 1, sec. 8) applied, which provided that no import taxes could be levied on goods shipped domestically. The seemingly mundane nature of the case did not hide from the

Supreme Court what was truly at stake: the Court was asked whether the internationally recognized sovereign borders of the nation were “congruent with the constitutional borders of the American political and legal system” (Raustiala 80). Or, rather, as one contemporary put it, “does the Constitution follow the flag?” (qtd. in Torruella 64).

The Supreme Court decided that it did not. By a narrow majority of five to four, it argued that import duties applied for merchandise shipped from Puerto Rico, because “the Island of Porto Rico is not a part of the United States within *that* provision of the Constitution which declares that ‘all duties, imposts, and excises shall be uniform throughout the United States’” (182 U.S. at 244, italics added). Not only stood the Court’s decision in direct opposition to the promise of freedom from import and export duty made to American Samoans in the 1878 Treaty of Friendship (art. 3), which was evidently to apply only as a one-way street in which Americans benefitted but not Samoans,<sup>10</sup> but also, as the word “that” in italics implies, did the Court come to this decision via a peculiar route. Justice White, in his much-cited concurring opinion, argued that “in the case of the territories, as in every other instance, when a provision of the Constitution is invoked, the question which arises is not whether the Constitution is operative, for that is self-evident, but whether the provision relied on is applicable” (182 U.S. at 246). This gave the Court the opportunity to argue that, in the case of *Downes v. Bidwell*, the provision was not applicable: “So long as Congress has not *incorporated* the territory into the United States, neither military occupation nor cession by treaty makes the conquered territory domestic territory in the sense of the revenue laws. But those laws concerning ‘foreign countries’ remain applicable to the conquered territory until changed by Congress” (182 U.S. at 247, emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> Questioning whether the clause is

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<sup>10</sup> The Treaty of Friendship was conveniently nullified by the Deeds of Cession, which did not include a renewed agreement on the matters of import and export, consolidating the one-way street of benefits for the U.S.

<sup>11</sup> Note the imperialist undertone of the Court’s language when it repeatedly refers to the acquired territory as “conquered,” which implies how the Court saw the peoples of these territories as only one step above “savages,” but in no way capable of self-governance. This is substantiated by my later explication of the racist sentiment of the day that informed the Justices’ opinions.

applicable, that is, whether the *right* clause is relied upon, created precedent for the court to legally segregate territories from the mainland, incorporated states.<sup>12</sup> Essentially, the majority opinion of the Court distinguished between territory that was incorporated into the United States, to which the Constitution applies fully, and territory that was unincorporated, to which only “fundamental” provisions of the Constitution apply (182 U.S. at 373).

Two things are significant to note about this decision. Firstly, the *Downes* decision was announced on the same day, May 27, 1901, as another *Insular Cases* decision: *DeLima v. Bidwell* (1901, 182 U.S. 1). In *DeLima*, Justice Henry Billings Brown, writing for the majority, argued that “with the ratification of the treaty of peace between the United States and Spain, April 11, 1899, the island of Porto Rico ceased to be a ‘foreign country’ within the meaning of the tariff laws” (182 U.S. at 1). This stands in direct opposition to the *Downes* decision announced later that day, which held that Puerto Rico was not properly part of the United States for the purposes of the full application of the Constitution. Indeed, as the justices of the Court themselves recognized in that decision, with noticeable understatement, “the decisions of the court upon this subject have not been altogether harmonious” (182 U.S. at 258). They resolved the incongruity that had risen by arguing that Puerto Rico “was foreign to the United States in a domestic sense” (182 U.S. at 341), separating it in status from incorporated territory.

What was meant precisely by *unincorporated* territory, however, was not clarified until 1922, when the Supreme Court explicitly associated incorporation with the prospect of statehood in *Balzac v. Porto Rico* (258 U.S. 298), legalizing my earlier argument of the term “territory” being dissociated from the prospect of statehood. In a unanimous decision, authored by Chief Justice William Howard Taft, the Court used the example of the

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<sup>12</sup> The Court did, however, clearly discern between the Constitution’s revenue and administrative provisions and its protections involving civil liberty and property rights. The guarantees of the latter, Justice White argued, “cannot be under any circumstances transcended” (182 U.S. at 295). It seems, however, that this is not fully true, which is substantiated by the non-application of many provisions of the Bill of Rights to American Samoa.

incorporated territory of Alaska, which they argued “was a very different case from that of Porto Rico. It was an enormous territory, very sparsely settled, and offer[ed] opportunity for immigration and settlement by American citizens. It was on the American Continent, and within easy reach of the then United States. It involved none of the difficulties which incorporation of the Philippines and Porto Rico presents” (258 U.S. at 310). What the language of this argument cloaks, however poorly, is that in the context of incorporation, “American citizens” refers to the settlers of the original thirteen states, meaning white people, and that the “difficulties” the Court referred to are racial differences that, according to the prevalent sentiment of the day, cannot be overcome (Laughlin 354).

Indeed, the second point that should be noted about *Downes v. Bidwell* is that eight of the nine justices involved in this case, as well as in the *DeLima* case, were also involved in the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896, 163 U.S. 537), which upheld the constitutionality of the “separate-but-equal” doctrine that resulted in the Jim Crow laws of the south. The *Downes* and *Plessy* cases, when read carefully, have quite a lot in common. For instance, it need not be repeated that *Plessy* was based on racist practices, but it is significant to note that the same racism permeates the *Downes* case. This can be seen in the *Downes* Court’s justifications for excluding inhabitants of the territories on racial grounds—justifications which were not only undisputed in the later *Balzac* case but also taken for granted. The *Downes* Court argued that “it is obvious that, in the annexation of outlying and distant possessions, grave questions will arise from the differences of race, habits, laws, and customs of the people . . . which may require action on the part of Congress that would be quite unnecessary in the annexation of contiguous territory inhabited only by people of the same race” (182 U.S. at 282). The Court added that if those territories “are inhabited by alien races, differing from us in religion, customs, laws, methods of taxation, and modes of thought, the administration of government and justices according to Anglo-Saxon principles may for a time be impossible” (182 U.S. at

287). Whereas *Plessy* legalized segregation based on race in the contiguous United States, *Downes* used racial justifications not only to segregate “practically two national governments—one to be maintained under the Constitution, with all its restrictions, the other to be maintained by Congress outside and independently of that instrument,” as expressed by Justice Harlan in his dissenting opinion (182 U.S. at 380)—but also to segregate unincorporated territories and their non-white peoples from the predominantly white mainland, preventing them from enjoying the full benefits of the U.S. Constitution.

There is one crucial difference between *Plessy* and *Downes*, however. *Plessy* was overturned by *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954, 347 U.S. 483), which recognized the impossibility of the “separate-but-equal” doctrine and the unconstitutionality of the deprivation of millions of U.S. citizens’ rights. *Plessy* is now regarded as one of the Court’s “greatest mistakes” (Immerwahr 2019, 86). The *Insular Cases*, by contrast, have been significantly absent from legal scholarship as well as U.S. historiography, and have not seen such a radical overhaul (Immerwahr 2019, 86). Indeed, they are still cited as “good law,” despite the numerous references to ethically despicable cases, such as *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, which they are built on (60 U.S. [19 How.] 393). The fact that the *Downes* ruling still stands is quite remarkable, for, even in 1901, Justice Brown argued that the measures taken by the Court should be regarded as a temporary arrangement (“for a time”) (182 U.S. at 287).

Perhaps more importantly, the *Insular Cases* established and continue to govern the legal framework for the governance of all unincorporated U.S. territories. It is because of the *Insular Cases* that the people living in the unincorporated territories enjoy only “fundamental guaranties of life, liberty, and property” and do not enjoy the full benefits of the U.S. Constitution (182 U.S. at 374). Indeed, *Downes v. Bidwell* provides the legal basis for severe restrictions in the territories, including the fact that numerous amendments, such as the Sixth (as established in *Balzac*), the Thirteenth, the Fourteenth (i.e. the citizenship clause), and the



Fifteenth Amendments (as established in *Downes*), do not apply to the peoples of the territories.

The impact of the *Insular Cases* should not be underestimated. Apart from the fact that they prevent American Samoans from gaining U.S. citizenship—rectified for the other four inhabited territories by organic acts—for a brief and rarely discussed moment in the early twentieth century, they also brought back slavery to American soil. When sovereignty of the Philippines was transferred from Spanish to American imperial rule, the newly acquired territory included the southern islands of the Philippines, which was then known as Moroland. Moroland was Islamic—its people were referred to as “*moros*”—and was thus governed by Islamic law. The Spanish had not been able to conquer the people of these islands, who took habit in carrying large blades upon their person, making them quite formidable adversaries. The Spanish compromised by signing a noninterference agreement with the Sultan of Sulu, reaffirming the Sultan’s authority as well as promising that Moroland remain in possession of their islands, customs, and belongings. These belongings, however, included slaves: “Slaves are a part of our property,” the Sultan had pressed in negotiations, “to have this property taken away from us would mean a great loss” (qtd. in Gowing 56). Subsequently, when the U.S. obtained the Philippines, they agreed to rule Moroland in the same way the Spanish did.<sup>13</sup> Legally, this was possible because the *Insular Cases*, the first of which was decided only two years before, provided that the Thirteenth Amendment did not apply to unincorporated U.S. territories. In effect, the non-application of the Constitution and its Amendments legalized slavery once again on what was regarded as American soil,<sup>14</sup> illustrating the gravity of the impact that the *Insular Cases* can have on the lives of those in the territories.

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<sup>13</sup> See also Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*, pages 103–107 for this interpretation of slavery in Moroland.

<sup>14</sup> The episode ended when in 1903 General Leonard Wood withdrew from the noninterference agreement and in 1906, slaughtered nearly a thousand Moroland in the Bud Dajo massacre (Immerwahr 106).

## CONCLUSION

*Downes v. Bidwell*, as well as the other, earlier *Insular Cases*, were being decided right when Samoan chiefs were deliberating to cede their territory to the United States. Indeed, the first of the Deeds of Cession was signed on 17 April, 1900, one year before *Downes v. Bidwell*—a Supreme Court decision that Samoan chiefs, who expected to gain U.S. citizenship after ceding their lands, surely would not have anticipated. More so, even if they had anticipated it, the decisions were never translated to Samoan nor were Samoans (or any other territorial residents for that matter) informed by the U.S. government as to how they would from here on be governed under the Constitution. None of the sources studied for this chapter (neither primary nor secondary) indicate that Samoan chiefs, let alone their people, were aware of the development of these cases, nor of the massive impact they would have on them and their territory after cession. In contrast to the repeated articulation by the American Samoan Government that Samoans had full agency in ceding their territory to the United States, the Deeds of Cession, when placed in a historical context of territorial expansion and imperial ambition on behalf of the United States, can hardly be designated as voluntary transfer of sovereignty.

What is more, the *Insular Cases* demonstrate how racial exceptions were built into the American legal system, racial exceptions that until today are kept in place and cited as “good law,” which segregate the American territories from the incorporated parts of the United States, placing them under the plenary powers of the federal government. Although it can be argued that the racist sentiments of the early twentieth century are no longer the dominant mindset of today, it should be noted that the continued upholding of the *Insular Cases* has turned early-twentieth-century racism into twenty-first-century institutionalized racial practices, even if only by the unwillingness to overturn them.

Finally, the *Insular Cases* illustrate how the designation of American Samoa as unincorporated, unorganized territory—an ambiguous designation that not only functions as a legal one, but as this chapter has shown, also inherently as a political one—has severely restricted Samoan capacity for agency. The larger context given here has outlined what legal and political restrictions were set for Samoans by American domestic developments as well as by geopolitical developments of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The chapter has drawn attention not only to how Samoans were denied a seat at the negotiation table, and therefore were not in full control of their own political fate, but also to the active impediment of and interference in Samoans' right to political self-determination. Moreover, the chapter has shown how after American Samoa became a territory of the United States, the capacity for Samoan agency diminished by the increased denial of equal rights and reciprocity in political decision making, not only impeding the fulfillment of the promise of American democracy for American Samoans until this day, but also designating the capacity for agency to other sites of meaning-making, which is discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3—THE “PROVINCIALITY” OF EMPIRE

### AGENCY AND EXCEPTIONALISM IN AMERICAN SAMOA UNDER NAVAL RULE

Whereas the previous chapter focused on the concept of “territory” and sketched the domestic American and geopolitical historical context for the restrictions on the capacity for agency of the residents of the U.S. territories, this chapter focuses on how American Samoans have dealt with those restrictions and impediments, and how they have exercised agency in face of them. It builds on Julian Go’s interpretation of the “provinciality” of empire, which refers to the specific local features per territory/colony that influenced American rule. Far from arguing that American empire was exceptional, Go questions “*where* ‘exceptional’ imperial forms surfaced and *why* they did where they did” (“Provinciality” 99, original emphasis). Go proposes that “if American rule appeared exceptional at all, it was not because of America’s exceptional character but the distinct characteristics of those whom empire aimed to rule” (77). This chapter shows how those distinct characteristics for American Samoa can be found in the ways in which distinct groups of Samoans exercised agency heterogeneously under naval rule.<sup>1</sup> It exposes the “exceptional” character of Samoan agency as an important feature in establishing Samoa’s “provinciality” of empire and underscores how day-to-day practices of resistance and cooperation are constitutive of the imperial state by constantly making and remaking that state in a local setting.

I begin with a brief reassessment of the tridominium period (1889–1899) by analyzing how Samoans turned a dire situation to their advantage, that is, how they exercised agency by climbing the ranks of the imperial powers and used the political advantages they obtained in those positions to forward their own agenda. I then move to the period after cession, in which

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<sup>1</sup> Go uses the case of American Samoa for comparative purposes, mostly in relation to Guam, but does not include a thorough analysis of the provinciality of empire in Samoa—a gap this chapter aims to fill.

American Samoa came under the plenary powers of the U.S. Navy (1900–1951). This period was foundational for the provinciality of empire in American Samoa and was characterized by agency in the form of resistance, which I illustrate with a discussion of the *Mau* opposition movement, as well as by agency in the form of Samoan cooperation with imperialist practices, which is exemplified by the *Fita Fita* Guard. The *Fita Fita* Guard also shows how Samoans appropriated American exceptionalist thinking and thus generated a distinct Samoan-American form of exceptionalism. Ultimately, both ways of exercising agency are shown to be heterogenous and multidirectional as various groups of Samoans had distinct interests, which lead to the paradoxical consequence of simultaneously challenging and reaffirming American imperialist practices.

#### AGENCY IN THE TRIDOMINIUM

From the earliest presence of American entrepreneurs and government officials in the Samoan archipelago in the 1870s onwards, Samoans have attempted to “retain control over their long-grown system of social relations and, thus, the contours of everyday life” (Droessler, “Whose Pacific?” 62). Nowhere is this more clear than in the colonial powers’ large dependency on local support to keep the imperial project in Samoa going, which, as Holger Droessler has argued, is one of the key characteristics of Samoan colonialism in the late-nineteenth century (“Colonialism by Deferral” 204). In this sense, the tridominium period not only contributed to the impediment of the Samoan capacity for agency, as laid out in the previous chapter, but was also constitutive of new, yet different, opportunities for Samoans to shape their lives under empire. This section reinterprets Droessler’s analysis of the tridominium period through Julian Go’s framework of the provinciality of empire to show how Samoan agency under the tridominium was an early, constitutive aspect of the American imperial state.

To begin with, under the occupation of foreign powers, Samoans for the first time had to negotiate their political aspirations beyond chiefly strife. Such negotiation materialized in the cultural contact zones<sup>2</sup> of the offices of Euro-American consuls and other colonial officials, located predominantly in Apia on the island of Upolu, as well as in Samoan villages, where Samoans not only “remained in charge of a host of administrative and executive functions” but, perhaps more significantly, where “hundreds of Samoan intermediaries” also performed tasks “ranging from tax collectors to clerks and interpreters, [which] actually made the colonial apparatus function on an everyday basis” (Droessler, “Colonialism by Deferral” 204). Consequently, in the early heydays of colonialism on the Samoan archipelago, Samoan agency, although controlled and restricted by the presence of imperial powers, could alternatively be found in the organization of daily life.

Especially Samoans of chiefly status were able to exercise a considerable amount of agency under the tridominium, which is illustrated by the person of Afamasaga Maua. Afamasaga was a *matai* descendent from an influential titled lineage, like most Samoans who worked in service of the colonial powers, who eventually became the chief secretary of the Samoan self-administration under German Samoa (Droessler, “Colonialism by Deferral” 216). He joined the German-controlled police force of the municipality of Apia in the 1890s, from which he climbed the ranks of colonial Germany, first as substitute translator, and later, promoted by the German governor of Samoa Wilhelm Solf, as official translator. Governor Solf’s dependency on Afamasaga grew so large that eventually he promoted Afamasaga to his “private secretary and advisor on Samoan matters,” making him one of the most influential Samoans of his generation (Droessler, “Colonialism by Deferral” 215). Afamasaga used his influential position to negotiate Samoan interests with the Germans, and vice versa, until the

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term “contact zone” in accordance with Mary Louise Pratt’s approach, who used the term “to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they lived out in many parts of the world today” (34). See Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone.”

very end of German rule in 1914—a position that according to Hermann Hiery wielded him so much influence that he “was able to behave almost like a dictator in all rulings which related to Samoans” (62n42). The example of Afamasaga Maua’s rise to power via colonial ranks not only shows how dependent the day-to-day administration of the colonial project in Samoa was on local officials as well as on “Samoan structures of authority (such as the *matai system*)” (Droessler, “Colonialism by Deferral” 215), but also shows how Samoans, in particular those of chiefly status, were able to exercise agency within that colonial project to benefit their own individual and collective Samoan interests with regard to day-to-day life.

Daily life was an important site for agency, also for those not of chiefly status, which is exemplified by the practice of “doing nothing.” Doing nothing may seem like a rather odd form of agency, because the concept of agency itself is frequently linked to change and evokes a commonsense idea of doing “something,” of acting. However, Samoans’ inclination to “not act” can be taken as a telling form of agency that indicated a different perspective of what day-to-day life should like look. More specifically, in 1902, the second naval governor Captain Uriel Sebree wrote in an annual report to the Secretary of the Navy that “the natives are naturally suspicious of white men [...] They are, in many ways, like children [...] the Samoan is naturally lazy” (qtd. in Chappell 225). Although the prevalent idea of the time of white superiority over “inferior savages” undoubtedly guided Captain Sebree’s remarks, a different reading is also possible here. As David Chappell has suggested in light of this report, “behind the writer’s patronizing condescension, we could also read cross-cultural questioning and calculating noncooperation on the part of ‘American’ Samoans” (225). Doing nothing, or as Chappell calls it, “calculating noncooperation,” may have appeared to the American “shipboard chain of command” style leadership as a “naturally lazy” quality of Samoans (Chappell 225), but can also be interpreted as agency in the form of non-violent resistance to colonial rule, which can be regarded as a navigation of the interstices of imperial power.

Indeed, nineteenth-century Samoans had a particular knack for navigating the metaphorical nooks and crannies of the political framework in which imperial powers operated, especially in practices of daily life.

Another point that illustrates this is demonstrated by how daily life included calculated simultaneous resistance to and cooperation with colonial rule. One daily aspect in which such simultaneously resistance to and cooperation with the colonial powers crystalizes is the attempt of the foreign powers to establish a head tax under the tridominium. A head tax had been attempted in the past, most notably by a Samoan chief named Tamasese, whose 1887 tax—collected with the purpose of supporting the colonial apparatus on the island—had not only been severely unpopular with the non-wage laboring Samoans but was also collected with force, backed by Germans and the intimidating prowess of their war ships (Davidson 65). As James Davidson has noted in his early study of the history of Western Samoa, the memory of coerced taxation for money that went anywhere but to the improvement of Samoan lives remained vividly present with Samoans, contributing significantly to their resistance to paying it (65). Yet, the tax was collected by Samoans, mostly local chiefs who worked in service of the colonizers and who used their influential position with their people to collect payment, which resulted in a simultaneous resistance to and cooperation with the colonizers by villagers, who did not want to disrespect their local chiefs. This shows how Samoan villagers exercised agency in a double negotiation, towards local hierarchies of chiefly governance and towards the colonizers, navigating the interstices of power that resulted from dual governance.

Such double negotiation is also visible in the actions of the Samoan chiefs collecting the tax, whose very act of collecting it in service of the imperial powers demonstrates cooperation, while simultaneously resisting a full and complete collection from their villagers. The paradox of simultaneous collection of and resistance to the head tax can be explained by



a willingness to comply with the imperial powers that would keep tax collectors in privileged positions, while also being bound by widespread Samoan kinship obligations that can be attributed to the *fa'asāmoa* and its commitment to sharing land and property (Droessler, “Colonialism by Deferral” 2015). The irregular collection of the tax resulted in an unsteady stream of income for the imperial powers, but an income nonetheless. What can be taken away from the tridominium head tax, therefore, is that it illustrates how the heterogeneity of Samoan agency, which can be found in forms of cooperation to remain in a privileged positions (with local chiefs and with colonizers) as well as in forms of resistance to protect Samoan kinship ties, already worked as a double-edged sword. It undermined U.S. imperialist practices while also keeping them in place, demonstrating how agency was a constitutive aspect of the American imperial state, which comprises a key characteristic of the provinciality of empire in American Samoa.

#### AGENCY UNDER NAVAL RULE

The five decades of American naval rule (1900–1951) that followed the partition of the Samoan islands after the tridominium fell apart have had a deep impact on the lives of American Samoans. The provinciality of empire, that is, the specificities of colonial rule in American Samoa during that period, have been marked not only by naval rule and the process of militarization that came along with it but have also been impacted deeply by Samoan resistance to and cooperation with both, which began in the tridominium period. This section utilizes Go's argument of the provinciality of empire to show how a heterogeneous exercise of Samoan agency, both in the form of resistance, which eventually led to the *Mau* movement, and in the form of cooperation, evident in the Samoan *Fita Fita* Guard, had paradoxical consequences for Samoans. My discussion of the *Fita Fita* shows, moreover, how American attempts to influence Samoans' public perception of naval rule led to a Samoan appropriation

of American exceptionalism, which resulted in a distinct type of Samoan-American exceptionalism that comprises another peculiar aspect of the provinciality of empire in Samoa. Both the *Mau* movement and the *Fita Fita* illustrate how Samoans navigated the interstices of imperial power and how the heterogeneous exercise of agency by distinct groups of Samoans was, in the end, constitutive of the American imperial state.

In order to understand the Samoan capacity for agency under naval rule fully, a few notes are necessary on economic and political developments of the post-tridominium period. Firstly, coal, for which the coaling station at Pago Pago was built, was replaced by oil as primary fuel to power ships due to technological inventions of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This severely decreased the economic value of Pago Pago Harbor—a decrease that was further exacerbated by a second development: the outcome of the Spanish-American War. When the dust cleared in lands far from Pago Pago, such as Manila Bay, Santiago de Cuba, and San Juan, Puerto Rico, after a three-month “splendid little war,” as Secretary of State John Hay called the conflict, the United States found itself in de facto control over Cuba, Puerto Rico and, more significant to my point, Guam and the Philippines. By this time, it had also annexed the Territory of Hawaii and acquired Wake Island, which together with its prize possessions obtained from Spain, offered a more direct trade route to the hard sought-after markets in Asia, turning the much more southern harbor of Pago Pago into an unnecessarily long detour. This diminished American interest in Samoa considerably, which now, according to Joseph Kennedy, “was not even considered a candidate worthy of an embassy, ambassador, a political appointee as governor, or any one of a number of other things that normally hallmark associations between nations—let alone between a colonizing nation and its new possession” (65). The commercial disinterest in the Samoan islands that followed after the Spanish-American War opened the doors for a different type of rule: that of direct rule under the U.S. Navy.

Whereas economic interest in Pago Pago as refueling station for commercial ships had disappeared nearly overnight, military interest in the harbor and the islands in general increased exponentially (Chappell 220; Uperesa 2015). The Navy is, after all, not interested in direct routes to Asia, but rather prefers strategic outposts from which ships and men could be deployed quickly if need be. Pago Pago, therefore, became the Navy's prime station in the Pacific, which the Naval War Board, on which the influential author of *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* Alfred Thayer Mahan served, found "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" (qtd. in P. Kennedy 143).<sup>3</sup> Joseph Kennedy notes that military interest in American Samoa was so strong that the private sector was no longer welcome in Samoa and, in some cases, was actively removed from the island (66). In effect, for the first half of the twentieth century, the islands became known as "Naval Station Tutuila" and were ruled by a strict and tight-shipped naval authority, which "short circuit the reciprocal powers inherent in democratic governance" between Samoans and the U.S. federal government (J. Kennedy 65). Naval authority was headed by the commander in charge of Tutuila Station, who would automatically occupy the position of naval governor of American Samoa and therefore head the civil administration over the territory. Naval governors were on short-term rotation, sometimes serving as short as only eighteen months (Campbell 60). Naval rule cut off Samoans from other colonies as well as from the mainland, keeping a secure distance between the American institution of liberal democracy and the Samoan way of life—a distance that was formalized and legalized by the *Insular Cases*.

Yet, this secure distance operated and continues to operate in both ways. It can also be regarded "as an important limit to the power of the American legal system and the encroachment of fundamental tenets of American political life that conflict with customary

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<sup>3</sup> The Naval War Board's recommendation was articulated in 1898 and put into effect only two years later by President McKinley's Executive Order No. 125-A, which established naval rule over American Samoa.

Samoaan sociopolitical frameworks and practices,” namely the *fa‘asāmoa* and the *fa‘amatai* (Uperesa and Garriga-López 50). This is illustrated by the fact that naval governors had a dual duty to satisfy public opinion domestically *and* to keep peace with Samoans, which they attempted to accomplish through a “Samoa for Samoans” approach. More specifically, a group of regulations put in place by Commander Tilley, the first naval governor of American Samoa, began with the prohibition of the sale of Samoan land to non-natives to protect the *fa‘amatai* (Noble 54). Forty-year leases were allowed, however. Commander Tilley declared that “the customs of the Samoans not in conflict with the laws of the United States concerning the naval station shall be preserved unless otherwise requested by the representative of the people” (qtd. in Keesing 201). This is important to note not only because it stands in stark contrast with what was happening on the mainland, where the 1887 General Allotment Act authorized the fragmentation and redistribution of Native American tribal lands, but also because *matai* titles “are meaningless” without communally owned land (Kruse 50). The Navy’s attempt to protect native lands, and by extension *matai* titles, marks a significant characteristic of the provinciality of empire in Samoa, which sets it apart from deeper-penetrating imperial intrusions in other insular territories or continental tribal lands.

The regulations set in motion by Commander Tilly illustrate a dual aspect of this provinciality: on the one hand, Samoans were left in charge of day-to-day governance over local affairs while the Navy recognized the authority of the *matai* system, whereas on the other hand, the regulations reasserted the centralized authority of the Navy, who, after all, allowed for Samoan customs to continue. Effectively, the Navy “claimed legitimacy by ruling through ‘traditional’ hierarchies of government-sanctioned chiefs, a form of indirect rule that relied on the ceremonial trappings of the *fa‘asāmoa* at the local level” (Chappell 227). To manipulate that indirect rule more to the likeness of American democracy, the Navy altered chiefly titles and established districts and counties in accordance with the new titles so that

they would fit better with American territorial rule. In 1901, Tilley uplifted the paramount chiefly titles of Mauga, Tuitele, and Tui Manu‘a to district chiefs, appointed other high chiefs as county chiefs, and gave oratory chiefs the power of judges on every level with the exception of the High Court Judge, which was held by the Secretary of the Navy.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the civil government of Samoan chiefs had now become a part of the naval government. Although Samoan chiefs were in charge of local affairs, they were placed under plenary, centralized power of the Navy. American colonial rule had become “an overlay, a simulacrum of central authority,” in the words of David Chappell (227), which collided with Samoan traditions and caused no small amount of friction between Samoans and U.S. naval administrators.

The alteration of chiefly titles was not the only cause for friction between the Navy and Samoans. A lack of education also contributed to uneasiness between the two overlaying forms of government. Now that American Samoa was under the plenary power of the United States, federal funding for education should have been allocated to American Samoan districts and distributed by the naval administration as seen appropriate. This would correspond with what Go identifies as the “democratic tutelage” agenda of American colonizers elsewhere within the American empire (“Provinciality” 76). Improvement in education was, moreover, a key factor in convincing the Tui Manu‘a in signing the second Deed of Cession in 1904. Yet, for all the talk of educating Samoans, operationalizing that education was not high on the list of priorities for the Navy. By the 1920s, Samoa “saw only one state-funded school” with “next to nil” funding for education (Go, “Provinciality 83). Captain Sebree, who succeeded Tilley as naval governor, noted on this lack of financial support for local affairs that “it is not the purpose of the U.S. to take [Samoans’] lands, or to tax them, or to do anything but hold this harbor” (qtd. in Chappell 225). Although Sebree’s statements were rather contradictory—

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<sup>4</sup> Today, the position of the High Court Judge is called Attorney General.

Samoans were taxed as early as the tridominium and land was taken from them, mostly under lease schemes that circumvented the Native Lands Ordinance of 1900—they hint at an important detail that characterized the provinciality of empire in Samoa. In a truly American exceptionalist fashion, naval rule was justified by a “Samoa for Samoans” approach “in part by the construction of indigenous Samoans as underdeveloped, nonmodern natives” (Uperesa 216), but in actuality took the form of benign neglect in which the naval administration exempted itself from responsibility for any development or modernization of the territory, while reaping the (geo)political benefits that came with the possession of the islands.

### The *Mau* Movement

As a result of an uneasy friction between the centralized authority of the navy and the decentralized *fa'amatai* system as well as a general discontent of the Samoan people with naval rule, illustrated by a lack of access to education, an opposition movement arose on the eastern Samoan islands in the 1920s, called *O le Mau*. This subsection discusses the ambiguous goals and outcomes of the movement as well as the incoherent and heterogeneous exercise of agency that followed from that ambiguity, showing in particular how the *O le Mau* eventually consolidated naval rule instead of undermining it. The literal meaning of the Samoan word *mau* means to stand one's ground, to firmly hold to one's opinion.<sup>5</sup> In relation to the movement, it is probably better interpreted as public opposition. On Western Samoa, a large *Mau* movement (*Mau a le Pule*) had already begun to form, challenging the authority, first of the German colonizers and later of New-Zealand administrators on the island (Meleisea 127,147). Yet, that *Mau* movement had one crucial difference with the comparatively moderate *Mau* movement of the eastern islands: the goal of the western *Mau* was independence, whereas the eastern *Mau*'s goal was an increase in local agency. The *Mau*

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<sup>5</sup> See Samoan-English dictionary at <https://en.glosbe.com/sm/en/mau>. *mau* non-capitalized refers to the word meaning “opposition,” *Mau* capitalized refers to the movement.

in American Samoa was not so much a push for decolonization, but rather “was a protest against arbitrary U.S. Navy rule” with the purpose of “improv[ing] relations between outsider and insider, based on equitable rights and local agency” (Chappell 218). Important to emphasize is that that insider-outsider distinction now included an ambiguous differentiation between local, lesser chiefs and the higher chiefs who had been integrated into the naval administration by Tilley in 1901. Therefore, rather than offering a strong opposition to American imperial rule, agency in the form of the *O le Mau* illustrates how Samoans’ attempts to navigate the interstices of imperial power were ambiguous at best and had no minor part in keeping imperialist practices in place, thus contributing significantly to the provinciality of empire in American Samoa.

The first point that substantiates this claim is that the eastern *Mau* movement was not a centrally organized or broad-based opposition supported by all American Samoans against a single, common adversary found in the Navy. Rather, it was a “low-level disturbance from a faction of Samoans and also from foreign residents and people of mixed Samoan-European ancestry” (called ‘*afakasi*’),<sup>6</sup> whose vaguely defined goal of increasing agency in relation to American naval rule was linked to a general malcontent with the restrictions for mobility that were imposed on previously fluid chiefly titles.<sup>7</sup> In an annual report to the Secretary of the Navy, Captain Stephen Graham, naval governor from 1927 to 1929, voiced suspicion that the *Mau*, which consisted mainly of lower chiefs and ordinary civilians, directed its demands for increasing agency not just towards the naval administration but also towards the higher chiefs working for and within that administration:

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<sup>6</sup> According to I. C. Campbell, the term ‘*afakasi*’ is generally not used in a derogatory way and is still in use today to denote people who are of mixed ancestry.

<sup>7</sup> Chiefly titles were fluid because there was “no fixed rule of inheritance such as primogeniture, nor a formal system of election,” resulting in an arbitrary selection of which member of the ‘*āigapotopototo*’ would obtain a chiefly title. The alteration of titles by Tilley to better fit the agenda of the navy imposed restrictions on that fluidity.

I asserted the belief that at the present time the activities of the leader of the Mau were really directed more against the high chiefs who were officials of the government than against the American governor or the government. They [High Chiefs Mauga and Tuitele, both government officials] agreed with me and Mauga stated that that had been the case since the Mau was born as a result of the ‘skipjack incident.’ This may not be the exact cause of the birth of the Mau, but I believe that it has sufficient bearing on the matter to be worthy of consideration (qtd. in Campbell 43).

The “skipjack incident” refers to an instance where a Samoan of non-chiefly status was punished by a local chief for not honoring the tradition of presenting him with the tuna fish he had caught (tuna was a chiefly fish), which led to the subsequent punishment of the chief himself by the naval administration for punishing the non-chiefly Samoan, because the chief supposedly lacked the authority to judge. Not presenting fish was, moreover, not a crime by law, according to Americans. Graham’s remarks as well as the skipjack incident demonstrate a “diminution in the status and authority of chiefs” and bolstered an underlying sense of discontent among lower chiefs that regurgitated quickly at moments of high tension (Campbell 43). This has led historian I. C. Campbell to argue that the *Mau* movement was not only a movement for “manoeuvring the Americans into according them some respect” but was also “a function of personal animosities and rivalries between chiefs” (47). Therefore, the *O le Mau* was not a nationalistic movement for independence, but rather a movement for more agency in an ambiguous opposition to both the plenary power of naval rule and the high chiefs’ integration into that rule.

Second to note is that the *O le Mau* was in no small way influenced and motivated by ‘*afakasi*. This is significant because outsider influence is often recognized as diminishing of indigenous agency. Yet, in the case of the *O le Mau*, Campbell observes that “‘*afakasi* and



foreigners had means, motive and opportunity” to mobilize an opposition that questioned chiefly title redistribution and discriminatory land practices (‘*afakasi* were excluded from titles and land ownership), as well as bolster minor inter-chiefly strife over, for instance, the way surplus taxes should be spent. ‘*Afakasi* contributed significantly to the *O le Mau* by demanding awareness and naval attention for the movement. Particularly, both Campbell and Chappell in their treatments of the *O le Mau* refer to the influence of Samuel Ripley, who was of mixed Samoan-European ancestry, and his family. Ripley had left American Samoa for California in 1904 at the age of fourteen and when he returned to American Samoa in July of 1920 in the hope of using family land in the district of Leone for a copra plantation, he was tremendously disappointed. Tilley’s land ownership regulations (specifically, the Native Lands Ordinance of 1900) prevented him from beginning the copra plantation he had set his mind to, because it forbade alienation of Samoan land. Ripley, although born in Samoa, was regarded as “alien” because he was of mixed-ancestry and had also spent most of his adult life in California and had married a Californian wife. In response, Ripley became an “agent for ‘the Samoan Government,’ that is, the *Mau*” and with the help of legal counsel, he began correspondence with Washington, arguing that naval rule was illicit in American Samoa due to the fact that the American government had never ratified the Samoan Deeds of Cession (Chappell 240). Ripley proved to be such a trouble maker for the Navy and the high chiefs who wanted to keep the land ownership regulations in place, that Governor Waldo Evans, naval governor from 1920 to 1922, deported him, twice.

Although Ripley aligned himself with the *O le Mau*, and the lesser chiefs and Samoans of non-chiefly status that constituted the movement, Samoans were not always charmed by the trouble caused by ‘*afakasi* and did their part to actively prevent their influence. This is ironic, because lesser chiefs and the general population’s interests often aligned with the ‘*afakasi* and not with the interests of the high chiefs who enjoyed a comfortable position

within the naval administration. Disagreement between lesser and high chiefs are illustrated by a high chief's answer to a young Samoan stenographer's remarks at a local *fono*: when asked why the high chief had "abandoned the *Mau*," the paraphrased answer written down by the stenographer was, "Gee, if I don't stick with the Navy government I won't get any job" (qtd. in Chappell 240). Disagreement between chiefs of different status further exacerbated when Ripley petitioned the Secretary of the Navy and the U.S. President directly in 1921. In direct response to that petition, Governor Evans called a meeting of 53 chiefs, 40 of whom attended, and asked whether Samoan chiefs allowed this *'afakasi* to speak on their behalf. In a counter petition drafted after the meeting, the chiefs asked that no changes be made to the current naval government and that Ripley was not their representative (Campbell 57). As the example of Samuel Ripley shows, protecting local interests against additional outside intervention outweighed the lesser chiefs' goal of increasing local agency and in effect kept naval rule on a firm footing.

The *O le Mau* contained more instances of non-violent, low-level resistance,<sup>8</sup> but eventually died out in the 1930s despite the fact that no specific demands had been met. The reasons for the end of the movement remain nebulous. Campbell offers the lack of clear purpose and the overzealous interference of *'afakasi* as reasons (59). Chappell, on the other hand, attributes it to a choice by American Samoans to integrate further into the American democratic system, which they regarded as relatively amenable to the *fa'asāmoa*, bolstered by the eventual ratification of the Deeds of Cession by Congress in 1929 (257). Certainly, both interpretations have merit, yet, it is the lasting effects of the *Mau*'s that are relevant to my purpose here. They show how the *Mau* was constitutive of the imperial state. The

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<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, space does not permit me to discuss them all here. Certainly worthy to mention is a 1922 plot by lesser chiefs to assassinate senior chiefs, which was uncovered before anything could happen and the plotters were sentenced to prison (Campbell 46). Moreover, some bills were presented to Congress, such as the 1926 Lenroot Bill, which would provide for a civil governor and judge, among other things, but none of the bills passed (Campbell 46).

multidirectional ways in which Samoans negotiated their agency, that is, in relation to inter-chiefly strife, in relation to the naval administration, and in relation to *'afakasi*, show how American rule was chosen over yet other outside interferences, such as by *'afakasi* and their mainland relatives. The exercise of agency in the form of the *O le Mau* shows how U.S. imperialist practices in the form of undemocratic, unequal, and non-reciprocal political relations were explicitly allowed to continue in American Samoa. In the end, the *O le Mau* was not a nationalistic resistance to American imperial rule but rather was a paradigmatic example of the way that a heterogeneous exercise of Samoan agency operated as a double-edged sword that, while undermining U.S. imperialist practices, also kept empire on a firm footing.

### The Fita Fita Guard

Whereas the *O le Mau* offers an example of agency exercised with the purpose of resistance to imperial rule, the *Fita Fita Guard and Band* offers a paradigmatic example of cooperation with imperialist practices, motivated by ideas of exceptionalism. This subsection shows how agency in the form of the *Fita Fita* contributed to the consolidation of naval rule over American Samoa and eventually led to a distinct brand of Samoan-American exceptionalism that placed the *Fita Fita* in a position somewhere between the authority of the Navy and the local power of (chiefly) Samoans, rendering the *Fita Fita* nothing short of cultural mediators between the two.

The *Fita Fita Guard and Band* (in short: *Fita Fita*) was a paid naval law enforcement group and musical band consisting of only Samoans, formed in 1900 by Naval Governor Tilley with the specific purpose of fostering cooperation between Americans and Samoans. Tilley reasoned that even though Samoans had ceded their sovereignty willingly to the United States (from his perspective), “there was always the possibility that relations between the

Navy and the Samoans might sour, and Tilley recognized that it was essential to have a mechanism in place to ensure continued cooperation in the face of any local political opposition when and if the laws of the United States conflicted with those rooted in Samoan custom” (J. Kennedy 74). This mechanism took the shape of the *Fita Fita*, who would receive military training that would establish some form of discipline with Samoans, Tilley reasoned, and would help win Samoans’ loyalty and allegiance to the U.S. (Gray 127). Correspondingly, the *Fita Fita* was promoted amongst Samoans as naval service of the highest honor and therefore attracted a sizeable body of strongly abled men, with even a few young chiefs among them (Darden 1). As Thomas F. Darden, the last naval governor of Samoa (1949-1951), remarked in his *Historical Sketch of the Naval Administration of the Government of American Samoa, April 17, 1900–July 1, 1951*: “It remained a privilege and distinction in American Samoa to be a member of the Fita Fita Guard and Band [...] Fitas were given access to purchasing and recreational facilities provided by the U. S. Navy. They were members of the Enlisted Men’s Club which was operated for Navy personnel on duty in American Samoa” (1–3). Essentially, the *Fita Fita* was an American initiative in the form of soft power persuasion and attraction for American life and American idea(l)s that penetrated Samoan’s lives in the form of militarization.<sup>9</sup>

Being a *Fita Fita* became a sign of status, not only because of payment which was equal to that of naval officers (by the 1930s, \$25 per month) and the benefit of being able to purchase American goods in the Naval Station store that came along with it, but also because of its distinct, uniquely Samoan-American uniform. A *Fita Fita*’s uniform visualized and

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<sup>9</sup> I use the term “soft power” in accordance with Joseph Nye’s interpretation of attracting and persuading others to cooperate, as opposed to using coercion and payment, which Nye terms “hard power.” The term “soft power” can be linked to the oft-repeated phrase of “winning the hearts and minds” of actors, paradigmatic of the post-9/11 discourse on war in Iraq and Afghanistan, but certainly no less applicable to the Navy’s attempts to attract and persuade Samoans. See Joseph Nye, *The Future of American Power*, chapter 4.



Figure 3: The *Fita Fita* Guard and Band, ca. 1943. Reprinted from the American Samoa Historic Preservation Office, <http://ashpo.org/index.php/component/content/article/80-fitafita.html>

signified their special status among both Samoans and the Navy and connoted an exceptional, distinctly Samoan-American form of colonial cooperation (Armstrong 52). *Figure 3*, a photograph taken in the early 1940s, shows over fifty *Fita Fita*, wearing what since 1923 had become their standard uniform. It was comprised of “a head turban of naval issue red muslin, a waist sash of red muslin folded to a width of 4 inches, naval issue white undershirt, and lavalavas (loincloths) of white and blue. [...] Rating designations are the same as for the U.S. Navy and are worn on the lower left corner of the lavalava just above the top stripe” (Darden 2). No shoes are worn with this uniform. *Figure 3* also shows that the *Fita Fita* were armed; they were issued M1895 6mm Lee Navy rifles, revolvers, and cutlasses, which is significant to note because other Samoans had been stripped almost completely of their weapons in an ironic attempt at gun control over racially and culturally distinct non-Americans (Armstrong 53). The *Fita Fita* are depicted standing in front of their barracks, which they built themselves and were dedicated on Flag Day on April 17, 1910, precisely 10 years after the Deed of Cession of Tutuila was signed. Naval Governor Darden described the barracks as “one of the

strongest and most beautiful buildings on the naval station”—his tone indicating a certain admiration for Samoan craftsmanship. These barracks, together with the uniform that consisted of both distinct American naval and Samoan characteristics and the weapons they were issued, highlight the exceptional position that the *Fita Fita* occupied as local law enforcers as well as cultural mediators between Samoan chiefs and ordinary Samoans, on the one hand, and the U.S. Navy and the integrated chiefs, on the other.

The *Fita Fita*'s exceptional position was bolstered by the fact that local Samoan police were not trained, were mostly unarmed, and served the main purpose of keeping peace in and among villages while executing the will of their local chiefs (J. Kennedy 77). The *Fita Fita*, on the other hand, received extensive military training and were taught English, making them effective and diplomatic local law enforcers, while being loyal not to a chief but to the naval commander of Tutuila Station. The latter is especially interesting to note, because traditionally Samoan loyalty was to the *'āigapotopoto* and to the local *matai*, but in the case of the *Fita Fita* the *'āigapotopoto* is “replaced by a non-familial, non-land-based unit” (J. Kennedy 80). The agency of the *Fita Fita* to band together in an *'āigapotopoto*-style unit bespeaks of a certain acceptance of a foreign *matai* (arguably found in whichever naval governor headed Tutuila Station) as well as showcases their willingness to act accordingly with that unit, placing the *Fita Fita* in an exceptional position in relation to the *fa'asāmoa* and the *fa'amatai*.

One specific example that illustrates the peculiar status of the *Fita Fita* as well as the *Fita Fita*'s assertion of their exceptional position is recounted by Karen Armstrong, an anthropologist who conducted several years of field research in American Samoa. According to a story told to her by Samoan villagers,

In one instance in the village of Fagatogo, a *taupou* (high-ranking chief's daughter) from Upolu was visiting with her female entourage when the *aumaga* hosting her got into a fight with some *Fita Fita* guardsmen who showed up unannounced to meet the women. Five men from each group were fined for fighting but the incident [...] was finally resolved when 60 members of the *aumaga* went to apologize to the *Fita Fita* guardsmen (53).

The incidents illustrates the complexity of the *Fita Fita*'s position within the *fa'asāmoa*: it raises the issue of ranking and status caused by American hierarchical interventions. The fact that a total of sixty men apologized, no less in the form of providing *tautua* to the *Fita Fita*, explicitly placed the *Fita Fita* above *matai* and *'āigapotopoto*, consolidating the special status of the *Fita Fita* on the islands. In the early 1930s, Felix Keesing observed that the *Fita Fita* had come to be regarded as “the aristocrats of American Samoa,” exemplifying the specific brand of Samoan-American exceptionalism that had slowly begun to develop with the *Fita Fita* (347). Essentially, their military status as well as their ambivalent position in between the Navy and the *fa'asāmoa* gave them a distinct and unique status—one might even say an exceptional one, while remaining cautiously aware of the imperial connotations of that term, as laid out in Chapter 1 of this thesis—which allowed them to exercise agency in ways that slipped between the cracks of power of either side.

How effective Tilley's guard proved to be in the five decades of naval rule is epitomized by how the exceptional status and high rank of the *Fita Fita* was recognized by Samoan chiefs, which can be illustrated by two examples. The first is an early instance where the paramount chiefly title of Tuitele needed to be filled after the death of Tuitele Penitila in 1902 (Armstrong 53). On his deathbed, the Tuitele appointed his son Toomata to the title, but Toomata refused because he was a member of the *Fita Fita*, which he considered of higher

status than the title of title of Tuitele.<sup>10</sup> The second example can be found in a letter exchange between Fai'ivae, the high chief of the Western District of American Samoa, and Naval Commander Henry Minett (via E. W. Gurr). Fai'ivae wrote:

I hope and wait for the Fita Fita to come back to Leone in two weeks and stay here in Leone and take care of the Government land and the flag, as was done before. But about any other trouble that might take place in the District, I can stop it. One fitafita, Taiese, remains here to look after the Government land and to take care of the flag. I told Poti to let your Excellency know this (qtd. in J. Kennedy 80).

The correspondence attests to the fact that chiefs called upon the *Fita Fita* to resolve conflict, particularly when it related to friction between U.S. laws (as enforced by the Navy and, by extension, by the *Fita Fita*) and the *fa'asāmoa*. By using the *Fita Fita*, it can be argued that chiefs expanded their authority into the Guard and, by extension, sought further cooperation with the naval administration.

By the 1940s, there were over seventy *Fita Fita* guardsmen in the official service of the U.S. Navy. In 1942, when the U.S. entered the Pacific theater of WWII, the number of Samoans in service of the Navy increased exponentially, though the status of the *Fita Fita* remained distinct among Samoans. Samoans had by then long been accustomed to the presence of the military on the islands and the militarization of daily life that came with it and, in a display of U.S. patriotism that has become common for the islanders, they readily jumped to aid the American war effort. Between 1942 and 1945, nearly a third of the islanders were in direct and indirect ways involved in aiding the American military staff stationed at Tutuila, which now totaled some 10.000 (Armstrong 59). Yet, this period also saw the

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<sup>10</sup> The title went to the much older Leoso, who passed away only a few years later. In 1912, Toomata accepted the title after over ten years of service to the *Fita Fita* (Armstrong 53).



limitations of the exceptional *Fita Fita Guard and Band*, most clearly in relation to restrictions that were imposed on them because they were not American citizens. WWII saw a significant increase in the mobilization of troops and people, in particular to and from Guam and Hawaii, in which Samoans could not participate due to the lack of citizenship and the legal restrictions on mobility that came with it. This led to many complaints by *Fita Fita* as well as Samoan marines who demanded citizenship, but nothing came of these complaints. It was not until 1951, when rule over the territory was transferred from one plenary power to another, that is from the Navy to the Department of the Interior,<sup>11</sup> that a large scale military migration from American Samoa to Hawaii allowed for Samoans to hold jobs outside of their territory for the first time. The *Fita Fita* was disbanded by awarding the remaining guardsmen the position of U.S. marines (and thus moving them to Hawaii), Tutuila Station was closed, and last Naval Governor Darden took his leave among islanders who now saw American strategic interest in their lands dissolve considerably.

## CONCLUSION

If exceptionalism can be found in the American empire at all, it is not because of a uniquely American, benign quality of imperial rule, but because of the distinct local ways in which empire was engaged with on a daily basis. As this chapter has shown, imperialist practices crystalized in Samoa in the early heydays of colonialism and continued throughout the period of U.S. military rule, but were always met with a strong Samoan will to improve their colonial position, both in the form of resistance and in the form of cooperation. By climbing the ranks of the tridominium powers, through resistance to plenary Naval rule in the form of the *O le Mau*, and finally through cooperation with the U.S. as imperial power exemplified by the *Fita Fita Guard and Band*, distinct groups of Samoans have navigated the interstices of imperial

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<sup>11</sup> See Executive Order 10264 of June 29, 1951, at <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/10264.html>.

power in ways that animated social change separately from the hegemonic power, while also consolidating that power.

The dominant, plenary power of the Navy over Samoans on all levels of the *fa'asāmoa*, on the one hand, mirrored by the hegemony of higher chiefs and the exceptional position of the *Fita Fita* in relation to lesser chiefs and ordinary people, on the other hand, shows how agency, by nature of being a heterogenous and multidirectional venture in which multiple interests are weighed against various considerations, has had paradoxical consequences that simultaneously undermined and kept in place American imperialist practices. This chapter has emphasized that the ways in which American Samoans have historically tried for social change were constitutive of the American imperial state through a constant making and remaking of that state on the local level found in practices of everyday life. The provinciality of empire in Samoa, that is, the distinct characteristics of imperial rule that crystalized under naval rule, may not be exceptional, but certainly were provincial.

## CHAPTER 4—VIOLENT EMPIRE?

### AGENCY AND CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Both Samoans and Americans pride themselves in the (ostensibly) benign imperial relationship that has developed between them over the past century and use this relationship as argument to bolster the idea that the United States has indeed been an exceptional nation, particularly with regard to practices of imperialism.<sup>1</sup> However, as the previous chapter has shown, if exceptionalism is to be found in American Samoa at all, it does not stem from the benign colonialism that Americans exercised on the archipelago, but can instead be found in the distinct characteristics of the negotiated imperialism that stemmed from the interaction between Americans and Samoans. This engagement with empire on a day-to-day basis ultimately contributed to a consolidation of imperialist practices in American Samoa of which the effects are still clearly visible today.

This chapter examines a range of newspaper articles, documentaries, and secondary sources to show what these effects are and how the imperial relationship between the American Samoan people and the U.S. federal government that grew out of the early colonial period perpetuated into the twenty-first century. These sources are approached through Johan Galtung's analytic category of "cultural violence" to explain how ongoing U.S. imperialist practices can and should be regarded as violent, despite explicit and continuous claims—by the American Samoan government, by the United States government, by individual politicians and their constituents who aim to protect the *fa'asāmoa*, by Samoans who do not want U.S. citizenship, or by Samoans who want to keep federal taxes out of their territory, among

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance American Samoan Attorney General Ale's words at the 2018 U.N. decolonization seminar, quoted in the introduction of this thesis.

others<sup>2</sup>—that the political relationship between the U.S. and American Samoa is a benign one devoid of direct violence. The violence that I aim to pinpoint is not found in the killings or large-scale displacement of American Samoans—as has historically been the case for other Native American peoples—but operates in the symbolic sphere of existence that serves as mechanism for the internalization of other forms of violence. It is a type of violence that permeates routinized practices of everyday life in ways that normalize imperialist practices and present them as natural and unchangeable facts.

The first section of this chapter elaborates on the link between cultural violence, imperial power relations, and practices of daily life, while the second and third sections discuss more in-depth how contemporary aspects of daily life in the form of an ongoing militarization of American Samoan society and unhealthy food practices are entrenched in imperial power relations and thus foster cultural violence. The fourth section shows how cultural violence legitimizes and perpetuates other forms of violence, such as the structural violence found in inadequate health care funding and veterans' care, and argues that American Samoans contributed to the upholding of the imperial status quo because cultural violence makes other forms of violence seem natural and unchangeable. Ultimately, the chapter shows how U.S. imperialist practices continue to govern the daily life of Samoans in the twenty-first century, whose agency within the U.S. imperial state has been driven to the ruts of life.

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<sup>2</sup> As explained in the introduction of this thesis, the Samoan people are heavily divided on the issue. See the *Samoa News* and its editorial section for a plethora of discussions between Samoans, for example at (scroll to bottom): <https://www.samoanews.com/opinion/op-ed-trump-should-support-equal-citizenship-all-americans> or <https://www.samoanews.com/local-news/update-federal-judge-rules-american-samoans-are-us-citizens-asg-and-amata-intend-appeal>.

## CULTURAL VIOLENCE IN AMERICAN SAMOA

Since the transfer of governance over American Samoa from the U.S. Navy to the Department of the Interior in 1951, American Samoa has been facing a form of “benign neglect” that followed the Navy’s early approach of “Samoa for Samoans” (Uperesa and Garriga-López 53). Although some funding was allocated to development and education under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the 1960s, federal involvement remained minimal while “island politics gradually shifted toward local rule” and regional matters (Armstrong 60). Benign neglect was consolidated by the ratification of the American Samoan Constitution in 1967, which legalized the *Fono* as territorial government and reinforced the prevention of land-alienation to non-Samoans, and was interrupted only by the organization of American Samoa as at-large congressional district in 1978, which allowed for a non-voting delegate to represent the territory in the House of Representatives.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, this benign neglect of leaving “Samoa for Samoans” cultivated a type of political relations between the Samoan people and the U.S. federal government that resulted in the imperial amnesia that this thesis discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1. The culturally violent aspect of the development of this relationship can be found in the ideology of “Samoa for Samoans,” which justified and legitimized a neglect that contributed to the upholding of unequal, non-reciprocal political relations between the subaltern subject and the imperial power.

Johan Galtung explains “cultural violence” as part of a “violence triangle” in which three forms of violence are distinguished by their relation to time: “direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a ‘permanence’” (294). The three forms of violence are not separate instances, but coexist and interplay, similar to the relation between an “earthquake as an event, the movement of the

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<sup>3</sup> This organization is not equal to the organization of the other territories by way of organic acts, which recognize an official structure of governance for these territories, rendering them “organized” territory. Although the American Samoan Constitution was ratified, the *Fono* was never officially recognized through an organic act, meaning that the territory remains unorganized.

tectonic plates as a process and the fault line as a more permanent condition,” as Galtung explains (294). Direct violence is immediately visible and can be found in examples such as the displacement of Samoan chiefs from their homeland and family in the form of political exile when they disagreed with imperialist powers under the tridominium.<sup>4</sup> Structural violence is harder to discern but would leave traces nonetheless and can be found, for instance, in the *Insular Cases* which segregated American Samoans legally and politically (and thus structurally) from the contiguous mainland and its citizens.<sup>5</sup> Cultural violence is defined by Galtung as “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence,” found for example in “stars, crosses and crescents; flags anthems and military parades” (291). Cultural violence, according to Galtung, makes “direct and structural violence look, even feel right—or at least not wrong” (291). Galtung’s interpretation of “cultural violence” as a form of violence that operates in the symbolic sphere of our existence provides for an analytic framework that sheds light on how imperialist practices continue to penetrate Samoan practices of everyday life in the twenty-first century, while it also explains how agency in the form of practices of daily life continues to operate as a double-edged sword that consolidates U.S. imperialist practices, even while various Samoan individuals and social groups attempt to undermine them.

An early, clear-cut example of how one of those spheres that Galtung pinpoints, the sphere of ideology, can be regarded as cultural violence is the previously discussed *Fita Fita Guard and Band* and its selective acceptance and appropriation of American exceptionalism. The *Fita Fita* literally wore their exceptional position on their sleeves, or rather on their

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<sup>4</sup> See Droessler, “Colonialism by Deferral,” pp. 213, for more on the deportation of Samoan chiefs who disagreed with or caused trouble for (one of) the tripartite powers of the tridominium.

<sup>5</sup> The unequal, non-reciprocal political relations that resulted from the “Samoa for Samoans” approach can also be categorized as structural violence.

lavalavas, which were decorated with Navy-style rank indications, and as band performed at ceremonies and marched in naval parades on the islands. They did so with pride, while leaving unquestioned the exceptional position that Americans had placed them in as cultural mediators, which gave the Navy the power to call on them to influence other Samoans to the advantage of American interests. This, in effect, contributed to the consolidation of U.S. imperialist practices in the form of unequal and non-reciprocal political relations between Samoans and Americans on numerous levels. Ideological fervor in the form of Samoan-American exceptionalism led to cooperation by Samoans and eventually to a legitimization of imperial rule that would otherwise be set apart as violent, normalizing the direct and structural violence of imperial rule by making it look and feel “not wrong,” as Galtung would put it.

The contemporary cultural violence that this chapter pinpoints can today be found in the effects of the continued upholding of a political relationship between Samoans and Americans that is characterized by a denial of “equal and reciprocal terms of cooperation,” which according to Lea Ypi constitutes the primary moral wrong of colonialism (158). The upholding of this relationship—which in itself can be regarded as structural violence—is bolstered by tension between conditions of protection, on the one hand, and subjugation, on the other. The protection of autonomous spaces for political and cultural self-determination and sovereign action, crystalized in the protection of the *fa‘asāmoa* and land ownership practices, are among the often cited and most pressing examples for the former, whereas the lack of citizenship and fair representation in the federal government form the backbone of arguments for the latter (Uperesa and Garriga-López 54). Arguments for both sides operate in what Galtung identifies as the sphere of ideology, while also crossing into other spheres such as language (English as dominant language over Samoan [Huebner 394]) and science (e.g. the teachings of American political science over *fa‘amatai* politics in high schools), in which the

*fa'asāmoa* and American liberal democracy serve as ideological cornerstones for practices of everyday life that collude and collide in upholding the imperial status quo.

Understanding how cultural violence penetrates daily life while perpetuating and exacerbating other forms of violence is, therefore, integral for the way in which social, legal, and political change can be animated by those on the periphery of the U.S. imperial state. Accordingly, the following sections analyze how the militarization of Samoan society and food practices continue to be entrenched in imperial power relations that foster cultural violence and restrict Samoan agency in both political matters and matters of daily life.

#### THE CULTURAL VIOLENCE OF MILITARIZATION

The pervading presence of the U.S. Navy in the early colonial era of American Samoa caused a militarization of Samoan society of which the effects are still visible today. This section identifies what these effects are and exposes them as cultural violence to show how Samoan agency in the twenty-first century continues to be diminished in capacity due to ongoing imperial power relations.

Although the U.S. Navy took its official leave with the closing of Tutuila Station in 1951, a military presence lingered on the islands, in both a physical sense and a nonmaterial sense. In the physical sense, the military remained on the archipelago in the form of recruitment offices, while in the nonmaterial sense, certain military values, such as loyalty, a sense of duty, or personal courage, among others, permeated Samoan life—likely the result of five decades of integrating naval rule with a *fa'asāmoa* that holds similar values.<sup>6</sup> Loyalty, for instance, can be found in longstanding examples such as Flag Day, a yearly celebration in which Samoans showcase their American patriotism and loyalty to the United States

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<sup>6</sup> See “The Army Values” at the Association of the United States Army: <https://www.ausa.org/army-values>.



alongside the *fa 'asāmoa*.<sup>7</sup> A strong sense of duty can be surmised from the extremely high percentage of Samoan enrolment into the military. In the years 2014, 2015, and 2017, the local U.S. Army Recruiting Station at Pago Pago saw the highest enrolment per year of all 885 worldwide U.S. recruiting stations (Chen-Fruean n.p.). Personal courage, particularly in relation to the military and personal sacrifice, is exemplified by the relatively high number of Samoans who have perished in recent wars, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan of the George W. Bush-era (Radio New Zealand; Sjoberg and Via 78).<sup>8</sup> The permeation of such values in Samoan practices of daily life in combination with the pervading presence of the military operate within a symbolical sphere of existence that Galtung explicitly identifies as sites for cultural violence, not only because they are ideological in nature but also, in the case of American Samoa, because they are imperial in origin.

To be more precise, a student testimony published in the *Harvard Crimson* illustrates the inescapability of the U.S. military for young Samoans and the military's continuous search for new recruits among youngsters at local high schools. Gabrielle Langkilde writes about how growing up in American Samoa means to be constantly surrounded by the U.S. military. Not only does she recall "family gatherings, with many family members reminiscing about their times at boot camp or out in the field," but she also identifies the pervading presence of the military at her high school, "with recruiters sizing students up, assessing our Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test scores, and bombarding us with all of the 'opportunities' the military has to offer" (n.p.). She refers to a strong Samoan sense of duty as well: "It's hard not to feel obligated to join the military—hard not to feel like it's your 'duty' to serve. When it is constantly presented to you as your best option, or rather your only

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<sup>7</sup> Until 1960, the American flag was used for this celebration. This flag was replaced in 1960 by the American Samoa flag in American colors (red, white, blue) and with a bald eagle holding a war club and fly-whisk.

<sup>8</sup> American Samoa leads the U.S. with a death rate of 138.8 per 1 million population, which is more than double the rate of the U.S. Virgin Islands, which has the second highest death rate of 54.6 (Radio New Zealand). More so, "the number of military personnel from American Samoa killed in Iraq on a per capita basis is almost 13.5 times the U.S. national average" (Sjoberg and Via 78).

option, [...] it feels like we aren't given any other alternative" (n.p.). The pervading presence of the military in Samoans' daily lives reiterates the idea that joining the military gives Samoans a sense of worth as people, which, in the words of Galtung, can be identified as a culturally violent way of reproducing "a readiness for military action, production and deployment" (296). The imperial aspect of such cultural violence can be identified not only in Samoa's colonial history as a military outpost but also in the paradigmatic example of the unequal, non-reciprocal political relations in the form of the denial of citizenship and voting rights. The Samoan high school students who are solicited, are generally not U.S. citizens, nor are they allowed to vote for their Commander in Chief, who will decide where Samoans will be deployed and where they possibly will find their deaths.

Cultural violence can furthermore be found in the legitimization of this treatment of American Samoans by a particular "geographical imaginary of Pacific islands as being unimportant and worthy of domination or destruction" (Davis 9). Such a geographical imaginary can be identified as what Melissa Wright has referred to as a "myth" of disposability and worthlessness (2). Wright shows in her study on subaltern women working for cheap labor in factories how myths of disposability and worthlessness have very real effects on people, which is no less applicable to the people of the Pacific islands. Langkilde demonstrates so when she identifies Samoans' need to feel a "sense of worth" as reason for enrolling in the military. Myths of the Pacific islands as unworthy and unimportant operate as social constructs that serve to legitimize and justify structural violence, such as a pervading military presence and the militarization of daily life, by explaining Samoans' "unlucky fate as a factual outcome of natural and cultural processes that are immune to external tampering" (Wright 2). Cultural violence can thus be found in the upholding of such myths, which legitimizes the structural violence of the U.S. military's recruitment of American Samoans for a nation that *unincorporates* the territory and denies its residents citizenship, fair and equal

representation in the federal government, and the right to vote in federal elections, which are presented to Samoans as natural and socially unchangeable facts. It is in this naturalization of structural violence that imperialism and militarization of Samoan daily life become culturally violent.

Agency, then, in face of that cultural violence is driven to the ruts of life, because cultural violence operates in invisible ways that have become normalized in everyday life. Social change cannot be animated effectively if the “issue” or “thing” that one opposes is not fully clear to one’s perception. Practices that operate on a symbolic level and have come to be normal, routinized practices of daily life are much harder to combat than the types of violence that are direct or structural. Rather than tackling the overzealous solicitation of the military for new recruits or changing myths of disposability, Samoans have resorted to proving their sense of worth in ways that reproduce a readiness for military action. Therefore, exposing such culturally violent practices is one step, but if new futures are to be imagined and realized, old myths about American Samoa and its people, as well as other Pacific island polities and their peoples, must be eradicated and new myths ought to be proposed. This not only begins with disposing of myths of disposability, but also by structurally improving socioeconomic opportunities for American Samoans beyond the military.

#### CULTURAL VIOLENCE IN FOOD PRACTICES

In addition to a militarization of Samoan life, the un/incorporation of American Samoa into the United States has accelerated a systematic extirpation of indigenous food practices on the archipelago, which has had detrimental effects on the health of American Samoans. Although food practices and their changes are also subject to a capitalist economy that focuses on maximizing profit (frequently) at the expense of healthy foods and a proper distribution of knowledge on food (e.g. in terms of nutrition values) (Dixon 321), this section argues that

these factors are decreasing in significance compared to an imperial dimension in the form of foreign foods as social status symbol. What I call a “cultural hierarchy of foods,” which is imperial in origin and culturally violent in effect, has accelerated the consumption of unhealthy high fat/ high sugar “pseudo foods,” which include (but are not limited to) cake, bread, sugary drinks, and processed foods, and have caused “a rapid influx of cheap, low-quality calories [that] can displace important micronutrients, like iron” (Blair n.p.). This has caused American Samoans to be among the most obese people in the world, with an adult obesity rate of 47% compared to 13% of Americans on the U.S. mainland (Lee-Kwan et al. 276).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, this section addresses how food practices—which are defined in the broadest sense to include meals, beverages, and alcohol that are consumed in the home, in social gatherings, or in public places such as restaurants—are entrenched in imperial power relations and can be characterized as culturally violent.

Medical researchers have been quick to point out two general causes for the contemporary predominance of unhealthy food practices, which are the influence of capitalism, economic development, and the transition from subsistence to a market-based economy, on the one hand (Nagata et al. 298), and a general lack of knowledge on nutrition, on the other (J. Parry 484). While both capitalism and knowledge distribution certainly operate in symbiosis with imperialism, recent research indicates, however, that both these factors have decreased in significance with regards to unhealthy food practices in American Samoa, implying that another cause should be explored. To be more precise, a 2015 publication by Lee-Kwan et al. for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported on the availability of healthy versus unhealthy foods in American Samoan supermarkets and convenience stores. The report concluded that “findings in the American

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<sup>9</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) defines obesity as equal to a body-mass index (BMI) of higher than 30. A BMI below 30 but higher than 25 qualifies a person as “overweight”—a classification that applies to a staggering 75% of American Samoans (Lee-Kwan et al. 276; J. Parry 484).

Samoa stores were comparable with those from studies conducted in stores in the continental United States (including in urban and rural environments)” (Lee-Kwan et al. 277). Whilst a capitalist drive for profit should not be ignored as underlying factor for making unhealthy foods available in the first place, the conclusion of the report indicates that there is no significant difference in the availability of healthy versus unhealthy foods between the continental U.S. and the Samoan archipelago. With the significantly higher obesity rate in Samoa compared to the continental U.S. in mind, the findings of the report imply that besides the capitalist push for pseudo foods, other factors contribute to the perpetuation of unhealthy food practices.

The second cause medical researchers have pointed out, a lack of knowledge on nutrition, has indeed been an important contributing factor to changes in Samoan food practices, but has over the recent years also decreased in significance with regard to unhealthy food choices. For the past three millennia, Samoan people have sustained themselves by fishing and farming, which contributed to a healthy diet of papaya, breadfruit, taro, fresh fish, lime, and coconut, among other local foods (Blair n.p.). However, since World War II and the mobilization of Samoans to other parts of the United States that came with it, American Samoans have increasingly come into contact with and shown an increased preference for foods and brands of food that are non-local in origin. While these foods can more often than not be categorized as pseudo foods and the labels on these food products, which have come from places far and wide in addition to the continental U.S., such as China or Malaysia, are often inconsistent in terms of nutrition information, a 2010 study by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that public health campaigns have significantly increased Samoans’ awareness of the nutritional value of such foods (J. Parry 484). Yet, Samoans continue to prefer unhealthy food options over healthy ones—an argument that the WHO illustrates with the example of schools teaching “good nutrition as part of the curriculum” but

then continue unhealthy food practices by selling “junk food in the school canteen” (J. Parry 484). Such practices show that despite the knowledge on nutritional value that is more widely available to Samoans, they continue to consume unhealthy foods over healthy ones.

The equal availability of unhealthy foods in Samoa and the U.S. as well as the (personal) choice to continue unhealthy food practices despite the more widely available knowledge that these increase the risk of developing non-communicable diseases (e.g. diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease), suggest that a different factor lies at the heart of Samoan food practices, which I identify as the high cultural impact of foreign, unhealthy pseudo foods as social status symbol. Indeed, medical researchers have increasingly paid attention to cultural factors that influence Samoans’ food choices (Morgan n.p.) and recent research has increased the legitimacy of bringing the insights of the social sciences as well as material culture studies on food practices into the debate on the overweight/obesity epidemic that haunts Samoans (and other Pacific islanders) (Dietler 220; Winson 300). Acknowledging the social and cultural factors that influence Samoan food practices also expose the cultural violence that stems from imperialism that lies at the heart of foreign, pseudo foods as social marker. The latter can be illustrated with an example. Nicola Hawley of Yale School of Medicine, who has done extensive field research on the link between food practices and non-communicable diseases in American Samoa, experienced what I term a “cultural hierarchy of foods”: “If you show up [at a social gathering] with a can of tinned corned beef, you’re much more well-received than if you show up with papayas from your garden. You’re considered to be less well-off or not wanting to make a good-enough contribution” (qtd. in Blair n.p.). Non-local foods and brands of food have become increasingly more readily available for American Samoans, while coming to imply a “higher social status and lifestyles similar to those in economically developed countries,” fueling what some have called in metaphorical terms “coca-colonization” (after a massive increase in the

consumption of Coca Cola-products in developing countries) (Nagata et al. 298). Such a cultural hierarchy of foods perpetuates colonialism in a metaphorical sense, while food as status symbol operates in the ideological sphere to legitimize structural violence in the form of unequal, imperial power relations. It is in this sense that food practices should be regarded as cultural violence.

A recent documentary illustrates how Samoans internalized certain social and cultural hierarchies that were established through imperial power relations. In “Obesity in Paradise: Unreported World,” which exposes the unhealthy eating habits of Samoans and the detrimental effects this has on their health, Sophie Morgan identifies the designation of mutton flaps as Samoan local delicatessen, which are imported from New Zealand where they are discarded as non-edible. Mutton flaps, made of sheep’s stomach and consisting of approximately forty percent fat, were exported from New Zealand to increase profit from waste meats (they are used for dog foods), for which the Independent State of Samoa, which was previously under its stewardship, became the primary market. Due to the close cultural kinship ties that the two Samoans have continued to hold over the years, it was a small step for mutton flaps to become a delicatessen in American Samoa as well. Morgan asks a local, Tavita—he and his family nearly all obese, including some of their children—why he continues to consume mutton flaps, even though he is aware of the unhealthy status of this food: “Our people love eating these cuts of meat, even though they say they are just waste... I feel for [my children] because they are eating sickness,” Tavita responds. His wife elaborates: “It’s much easier for us to eat healthy foods from our own land rather than the food we have to buy.” Tavita and his wife’s comments suggest that the food they have to buy offers them a higher social status than local, homegrown foods, no matter the bad nutritional values. This example of mutton flaps as delicatessen illustrates how imperial trade routes and a cultural

hierarchy of food have entrenched food practices in an imperial web that normalizes daily habits that can be characterized as cultural violence.

Like mutton flaps, the type of non-local foods that have attained a higher cultural status nearly all fall within the marker of high fat/ high sugar pseudo foods that offer little nutritional value, which supports the idea that food practices are a “consistently prominent material medium for the enactment of colonialism” (Dietler 219). Food is, after all, much more than just a biologically necessary way of sustaining our bodies. As Michael Dietler has demonstrated in his research on the link between food, identity, and colonialism, “people do not ingest calories or protein: rather, they eat food, a form of material culture subject to almost unlimited possibilities for variation in terms of ingredients, techniques of preparation, patterns of association and exclusion, modes of serving and consumption, aesthetic evaluations, and so forth” (222). Eating should thus be regarded as a social act—one that occupies a significant position amongst routinized practices of daily life and serves to inculcate habitus, as Bourdieu has argued at length (cf. *The Logic of Practice* and *Distinction*).<sup>10</sup> Food practices, therefore, unconsciously recreate perceptions of identity and difference, which in American Samoa crystalize in a local/ foreign binary that leads to a cultural hierarchy of foods that places unhealthy pseudo foods on a cultural pedestal and denigrates the status of home-grown (often healthy) foods. The act of bringing tinned beef or a bottle of Coca-Cola to a social gathering places one in a culturally higher status that transcends socioeconomic class or hierarchical rank within the *fā‘asāmoa*, while symbolically reiterating American Samoa’s lower, colonial status within the United States.

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<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu argued that health and lifestyle behaviors are subject to class distinction: “high socioeconomic groups differentiate themselves from low socioeconomic groups by adopting healthy lifestyles, and low socioeconomic groups distinguish themselves from high socioeconomic groups with behaviors that give them a sense of ‘freedom from convention’” (Kamphuis et al. 2). He identifies “taste” as marker for various lifestyle attributes, such as music, art, and food, which is developed through “cultural capital,” a non-material resource that accumulates throughout the course of life (cf. Bourdieu, *Distinction*). For Samoans, the marker for taste is imperial, both in origin and in consequence, because the socioeconomic differentiation takes place in a foreign/local binary.



Agency in relation to food practices, then, is stuck in a rut. Food practices as inculcated habitus, as normalized and routinized practices of daily life, reiterate imperial power relations in ways that are not always clear to Samoans, because they operate in the invisible, symbolic sphere of life. Ideological underpinnings that find their roots in imperialism, such as the cultural hierarchy of food that designates social status, are hard to break with when they permeate a daily practice as mundane as eating in ways that make them seem as if they are natural, cultural processes. While ongoing awareness campaigns as well as medical programs to treat Samoans for non-communicable diseases as a direct result of unhealthy food choices are needed for a sustained impact, if change is to be realized more permanently with regard to food practices, exposing the ideological, imperial underpinnings that guide Samoan food choices is a critical process.

#### CULTURAL VIOLENCE AND THE EXACERBATION OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

So far, I have discussed what the causes for cultural violence in relation to a militarization of Samoan society and Samoan food practices are. Some effects of this cultural violence have also been implied, but need to be addressed more in-depth in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the extent to which cultural violence affects American Samoans. In more general terms, the effects of cultural violence can be characterized as a continuation, and sometimes an increase, of structural violence, which offers an explanatory framework for how colonized peoples may contribute to upholding the imperial status quo. This section discusses how this is the case for American Samoa and once again points to how Samoan agency with regard to matters of daily life is restricted in capacity and driven to the ruts of life of culturally violent processes.

To begin with militarization, the pervading presence of the U.S. military on the Samoan archipelago has offered young Samoans with job opportunities that the slow

economy and low wages of the Samoan islands do not, while veterans care remains notoriously inadequate due to a lack in federal funding as well as ineffective distribution of available funds (Coleman Radewagen). Current American Samoan delegate to the House of Representatives, Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen, has pressed the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health for more funding and an improvement of hiring practices that will retain good employees. In a press release of 22 March, 2017, she referred to the high recruitment rate of Samoans by the military, while expressing her concerns: “I find it quite distressful then that my constituents, who greatly rely on the services of the Department of Veterans Affairs, often have to travel to Hawai’i for medical care. Now, the onus of the blame cannot solely be placed on the Department of Veterans Affairs; it’s failure of action here in Congress that punishes veterans as well” (n.p.). The high recruitment rate indicates that increasing numbers of Samoans need veterans care. Yet, the inadequate veterans care in Tutuila requires them to travel some 2500 miles from home for treatment for conditions such as PTSD and other mental health conditions that frequently follow war time deployment. Although flights are cheap, they require Samoans to go to great lengths compared to those in need of medical care on the mainland. Agency with regard to change, therefore, is geared towards improving the structural violence of inadequate veterans care, as Representative Coleman Radewagen’s words exemplify. The underlying cultural violence identified earlier in this chapter remains largely unaddressed. While Samoans continue to see a military career as their “only option” for social mobility and a sense of worth (Langkilde n.p.), in actuality Samoa’s high enrolment rate continues a cycle of cultural violence that exacerbates the structural violence of inadequate funding and health care. This once again points to a high need for decreasing the cultural violence that befalls American Samoa if structural violence is to be decreased as well.

A similar pattern can be identified for food practices. American Samoans' cultural preference for unhealthy pseudo foods has led to an extremely high rate of obesity on the archipelago, with an estimate of 75% of people overweight and nearly 50% obese (Lee-Kwan et al. 276; J. Parry 484). It is generally known that obesity leads to an increased risk of developing non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension, which in turn leads to a higher need for medical care. Over the past two decades, approximately 40–60% of the total health care spending of American Samoa has been spent on the treatment of these diseases (J. Parry 484). The funding for health care in American Samoa is, however, capped due to the unincorporation doctrine that followed the *Insular Cases* (Simmons-Duffin n.p.), placing food practices and health care for American Samoans in a culturally violent imperial web that disadvantages American Samoans considerably compared to mainland U.S. citizens.

To explain this latter pattern more clearly, the cultural violence found in unhealthy food practices that are entrenched in imperial, ideological underpinnings that hierarchize food culturally, structurally increase the need for Medicaid. Medicaid itself is not a violent program (rather the opposite), but the way funding is allocated for the program can be characterized as a structural violence that can be traced directly to the unincorporation doctrine that followed the *Insular Cases*. The structural violence can be pinpointed by offering numbers: In 2017, approximately 65% of American Samoans lived below the federal poverty line (Sagapolutele, "Small Economies" n.p.), approximately 79% of all Samoans made use of Medicaid, which is a very high rate compared to other territories and the U.S. mainland (MACPAC), and federal contributions to Medicaid for the unincorporated territories was subject to a statutory cap and a fixed matching rate of 55% (Hall, Rudowitz, and Gifford 3). The territories' designation as unincorporated parts of the United States has allowed for a different formula to determine federal Medicaid contributions: whereas in states federal contributions to Medicaid rely on the

per capita income per state (known as the federal medical assistance percentage, or FMAP)—giving a poor state such as Alabama a matching rate of 72%, meaning “for every dollar Alabama spends on Medicaid, the federal government contributes about \$2.57 to the program”—in the territories the matching rate is fixed at 55%, which translates to \$1.25 in federal contributions for every dollar American Samoa spends on Medicaid (Simmons-Duffin n.p.).<sup>11</sup> Each dollar spend on Medicaid by the territory itself comes from local taxes, which are low in revenue due to the high percentage of Samoans (65%) living below the federal poverty rate, meaning that funding for Medicaid is insufficient in relation to Samoans’ high need for health care. These numbers demonstrate how funding for Medicaid is stuck in a structurally violent circle of low income, low funding, and a high need by Samoans. This high need for Medicaid, in turn, is exacerbated by the cultural violence in the form of unhealthy food practices, placing Medicaid in a culturally violent web of imperial power relations.

Pinpointing the negative consequences that stem from militarization and food practices entrenched in culturally violent, imperial power relations is important, because it demonstrates how cultural violence exacerbates and perpetuates structural violence in American Samoa. More so, agency of Samoans, particularly in the form of political agency and in relation to social change, is driven to the ruts of life, because it is geared towards the improvement of structural violence, while it remains stuck in culturally violent, routinized practices of daily life. In this sense, resistance takes place only within the well-established, normative framework of American legal practices and liberal democracy. If social change is to be realized at the periphery of the American imperial state, Samoans need to become more aware of the cultural violence that prevents them from increasing their agency with regard to

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<sup>11</sup> The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (ACA), also known as Obamacare, offered a one-time grant of \$7.3 billion for the territories’ Medicaid program, which was extended by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 with an extra \$4.9 billion after two hurricanes devastated much of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in 2017 (Simmons-Duffin n.p.). For the 2020 and 2021 fiscal years, the FMAP has been increased to 83%, but again is this only a temporary solution, not a structural one.

political matters and matters of daily life, as well as the role their own agency plays in upholding the unequal imperial status quo.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced how the imperial relationship between the United States and American Samoa that grew out of the early colonial era has perpetuated into the twenty-first century.

Through the use of Johan Galtung's analytic category of "cultural violence," I have pinpointed how routinized practices of daily life, found in the ongoing militarization of Samoan society and in a cultural hierarchization of foods as social status marker, foster a type of violence that operates in the symbolic sphere of existence and thus can be invisible to the naked eye. By placing the ongoing militarization of Samoan society and Samoan food practices under a microscope, this chapter has shown that despite claims that the imperial relationship between Samoans and Americans is a benign one, it should be characterized as violent nonetheless. While cultural violence is of a different nature than its more clearly visible counterparts of direct and structural violence—exemplified by an American history full of genocide, large-scale displacement, and slavery—the chapter has shown how this type of violence has very tangible effects for the Samoan people, whose agency with regard to practices of everyday life as well as political, social, economic, and cultural matters continues to be influenced by an unequal imperial status quo.

Agency in the face of cultural violence has been driven to the ruts of life, because cultural violence has become a part of normalized, routinized practices of daily life that serve to inculcate habitus. Breaking with such ostensibly natural and socially unchangeable facts requires exposing the cultural violence that underlies it, particularly in relation to how agency is exercised for the animation of social change. In relation to the cultural violence of militarization, old myths about the disposability and worthlessness of Pacific island polities

must be eradicated and replaced by new ones, if the symbolic level at which cultural violence operates is to be changed. With regard to Samoans' unhealthy food practices, ongoing awareness campaigns as well as medical programs to treat Samoans for non-communicable diseases as a direct result of unhealthy food choices are needed, but if permanent change is to be realized, uncovering the imperial underpinnings that guide these practices is a crucial step. Cultural violence is, after all, what legitimizes other forms of violence, so for those on the periphery of the American imperial state who fight for a more equal and just society, exposing and countering cultural violence is a crucial step in overcoming the direct and structural violence that stem from U.S. imperialist practices.

## CONCLUSION

Agency in the face of legal, political, and cultural disenfranchisement within the American empire has been the focal point of this thesis, as it addressed the research question as to how American Samoans have exercised agency distinct from the dominant power of the imperial state and what the effects have been of the way they exercised that agency. The concept of agency has provided for an analytic framework that locates the possibility for change with those of subaltern status rather than with the elite, even within an imperial state in which the predominant influence on domestic politics lies with the state nobility. Yet, while the possibility for change may lie with the Samoan people, my analysis has shown that Samoans have exercised agency in heterogeneous and multidirectional ways—that is, differently by distinct Samoan individuals and social groups as well as in relation to Western Samoans, other regional actors, and the imperial state—which have had the effect of a double-edged sword: agency undermined the hegemonic, imperial power while simultaneously consolidating the unequal, imperial status quo. In part, this can be attributed to a Samoan ongoing willingness to be a part of the American empire, despite the inferior political position this has placed them in. As American colonizers made concessions with regard to indigenous culture and traditional politics on the archipelago, giving American Samoans (nearly) full autonomy over these aspects of their lives, other, more indirect matters such as full and equal rights as Americans have been pushed to the background in a long century characterized by a Samoa-for-Samoans approach. On the other hand, Samoans have also shown a pervasive will to improve their situation through attempts to transform the structural inequality that they have experienced in the American imperial state, meaning that concessions, no matter how large, were never enough to justify imperial rule.

To show how Samoan agency has operated as a double-edged sword, Chapter 1, “Empire State of Mind,” first delved into the ideological underpinnings that perpetuate structural inequality in the form of unequal, non-reciprocal political relations between Samoans and the U.S. federal government. It has examined how the state nobility has set qualifications for the agentic capacity of American Samoans, as well as other territorial residents, within the American imperial state through the hegemonic political practice of imperial amnesia. The chapter has pinpointed four influential sites of imperial amnesia—(1) “empire” as referring to informal spheres of influence, (2) “colonialism” as referring to white settler colonialism, (3) the pervasiveness of the doctrine of American exceptionalism, and (4) continued (institutionalized) racism—which severely restrict the capacity for agency of territorial residents. Yet, the chapter has also laid out how the American imperial state is construed and constructed as an ambiguous apparatus marked by tensions and conflicts between distinct social groups for various forms of capital. The imperial state is not, after all, a totalitarian one, but one in which agency of the colonized can be located at the interstices of power and in practices of everyday life. The analytic category of agency of the colonized opens space for understanding the American imperial state as an effect of practices of daily life that organize and are organized by people and space, rather than as a bureaucratic apparatus of power that leaves subalterns immobile within that state.

Correspondingly, I have analyzed the structures and mechanisms that produce conditions of power, which lie not only in the hegemonic political practices of the imperial state but also in the distinct characteristics of the peoples and territories that empire aims to rule. Chapter 2, “Empire in the Making,” has focus on the concept of “territory” to show what the imperial underpinnings of those structures and mechanisms are, while it argued that the concept’s ambiguous status has been used to impede equal and reciprocal relations between the United States and American Samoa, as well as restrict agency of Samoans considerably.



Within a historical context of U.S. expansionism, American Samoa's designation as "unincorporated, unorganized territory" hid its actual status, that of colony, which pushed Samoans to cede their islands to the United States voluntarily, yet under circumstances that render their willingness inconsequential. While other imperial presences appeared to Samoans as less appealing options, Americans had already proclaimed their authority over the territory, establishing an unequal imperial status quo that designated Samoans as subaltern subjects. The unequal, non-reciprocal political relations between Americans and Samoans that characterized this imperial status quo crystalized in the tridominium years by the exclusion of Samoans from the (inter)national negotiation tables and was consolidated and legalized in the first decade of the twentieth century by the decisions of the *Insular Cases*. The unincorporation doctrine that followed from these cases segregated Samoans from mainland Americans legally as well as economically and delivered the final blow to preventing Samoans from becoming a full, legal—that is, an "incorporated"—part of the United States, restricting their agency in ways that affect Samoans until this day.

Yet, while restrictions on Samoan agency were set in place by the (geo)political developments of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, Samoans showed curious reactions to those developments. As Chapter 3, "The 'Provinciality' of Empire," has shown, rather than fully resisting American-imposed rule, Samoans of distinct social groups exercised agency in heterogeneous and multidirectional ways that resulted in a simultaneous challenge and reaffirmation of American imperialist practices. The chapter has shown that the exceptional character of Samoan agency was an important feature in establishing Samoa's "provinciality," found in the distinct form of exceptionalism that arose from the interaction between Samoans and Americans, which underscores how day-to-day practices of resistance and cooperation are constitutive of the imperial state by constantly making and remaking that state in a local setting. In particular, resistance in the form of the *O le Mau* took shape, but did

so while setting ambiguous and incoherent goals, which ultimately led to a consolidation of American rule. Rather than offering a nationalist movement that united all Samoans under a banner of resistance to imperialist practices, some Samoans actively worked with the United States Navy while others preferred naval rule over further outside interference by *'afakasi*, illustrated by the discussion of the *'afakasi* Samuel Ripley. The *Fita Fita Guard and Band*, on the other hand, took acceptance of American naval rule one step further as they united in an *'āigapoto*-style unit that took as *matai* whichever naval governor was stationed at Tutuila. The *Fita Fita* were placed in a position nothing short of cultural mediators between Americans and Samoans, while given a power that transcended that of traditional *matai* and *'āigapoto*, which contributed to the consolidation of imperial rule on the Samoan archipelago. Leaving unquestioned the exceptional position that the *Fita Fita* found themselves in, the ideological underpinnings in the form of a unique and distinct Samoan-American form of exceptionalism offers an early example of attempts to normalize and legitimize imperial rule in American Samoa and shape Samoan agency to the interests of the American imperial state.

The normalization and legitimization of direct and structural violence in the form of imperialist practices, such as denying Samoans the right to political self-determination or establishing unequal, non-reciprocal political relations between the Samoan people and the federal U.S. government, not only continue to shape qualifications for Samoan agency but also led to a form of violence that is invisible to the naked eye: cultural violence. Chapter 4, “Violent Empire?”, has placed this form of violence under a microscope to show how twenty-first-century practices of everyday life, particularly in the form of the ongoing militarization of American Samoan society as well as a practice as mundane as eating habits, continue to be entrenched in imperial power relations and ultimately contribute to the upholding of the imperial status quo, even when Samoans struggle to improve their situation. The microscope

on militarization has shown that the inescapability of the military who has remained present on the archipelago (especially in relation to youngsters looking to improve their socioeconomic position) as well as pervading myths about the Pacific islands as disposable and worthless, have contributed to a Samoan sentiment that imperialist practices are natural and unchangeable facts. The analysis of food practices, on the other hand, has shown how a cultural hierarchy of food based on a local/non-local binary driven by imperial, ideological underpinnings grants Samoans who consume foreign, unhealthy pseudo foods a higher social status than those who prefer healthy, local products. Instead of tackling the cultural violence that keeps in place these practices, which have detrimental effects for Samoans, particularly in relation to their health, attempts at social change have mostly been geared towards changing the structural violence that is more directly visible to Samoans. My analysis of practices of everyday life has not only shown once again that it are local practices and the thickening of these which constitute the imperial state's existence but has also offered an explanatory framework for why American Samoans have (unwillingly) exercised agency in ways that were constitutive of and perpetuated the state of American empire, even while attempting to undermine it.

The trialectic of “territory,” “exceptionalism,” and “cultural violence” thus shows that while Samoans have indeed exercised agency in a manner distinct from the hegemonic, imperial power, they have done so while participating (perhaps unwillingly or unknowingly) in practices that uphold the unequal imperial status quo. While agency can be found in practices of everyday life that are constitutive of the imperial state, the ideological and symbolic underpinnings that guide some of these practices have legitimized, naturalized, and consolidated imperial rule, whether as clearly visible as in the case of the *Fita Fita Guard and Band* or less clearly visible as in the case of the symbolic reiteration of American Samoa's lower, colonial status within the United States through a cultural hierarchy of foods. Today,

Samoan agency in practices of daily life is driven to the ruts of Samoan life, even though Samoans continue to seek improvement and find new ways for animating social change. Ultimately, the analysis of Samoan agency shows that U.S. imperialist practices have had lasting effects on the lives of Samoans and presses that imperialist practices continue to have very real, tangible consequences for those on the edge of the American empire. A rethinking of the way agency is exercised is needed if social change is to be brought about at the periphery of the American imperial state.

Whereas I have emphasized what the effects are of the ways in which agency has been exercised (heterogeneously and multidirectionally) by Samoans for the (trans)formation of the twenty-first-century American imperial state, future research that delves deeper into the political, legal, cultural, symbolic, and ideological underpinnings that uphold American empire today, particularly in relation to its insular territories, is needed. I have aimed to fill a gap in scholarship on American empire by discussing the particular historical conditions of colonialism in American Samoa as well as their complex persistence and ongoing reconfigurations—which have rarely been placed at the center of current mainstream debates on American empire. Yet, academic research on how to best repair historical, moral wrongs (in the form of structural inequality) and their effects has quite some ways to go. Therefore, I urge researchers to devote their resources to investigating what ways of bringing about social change are most productive, most beneficial, and most conducive for creating a more equal United States. This research should not only focus on one case, as I have in this thesis, but should expand to include comparative analyses of the agency of those living in the other insular territories. A focus on these peripheries instead of the core of American empire will not only make more evident the lasting consequences of colonialism, which has “profoundly implicated all those caught in its grip whether core or periphery, colonizer or colonized” (McCoy and Scarano 7), but can also expose the mutually transformative nature of American

colonial rule. As McCoy and Scarano have put it, “no matter how limited in scale or duration,” or how superficial the imperial penetration, I would add, “colonialism left a lasting imprint” on both the core and the periphery that was, “for colonizer and colonized, separately empowering and eviscerating, yet mutually traumatic and transformative” (7). In the end, the histories of the peripheries are, after all, as much a part of the United States and as important for understanding the United States as is the history of the core.

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