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***Militarized Foodways: The Connection Between the Militarization of American Sāmoa and  
Chronic Health Conditions Experienced by Samoans in the U.S.***

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in  
American Studies at Pomona College

April 21, 2023

Readers:

Professor Alfred Flores, Harvey Mudd College

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### *Abstract*

American militarism and imperialism in Oceania led to the partitioning of Sāmoa, transforming Eastern Sāmoa into an unincorporated American territory, one that persists to this day. Sāmoans living in the United States continue to face numerous chronic health illnesses to this day. Both of these statements are true, but how are they related to one another? This thesis proposes “militarized foodways” as a way to bridge the gap and understand how those two statements are connected to one another. Militarized foodways refers to how the cultural, social, and economic practices concerning production and consumption of food have taken a military quality following militarization (or reliance on the military as an institution) of a space. Focusing on the role of imported food, this paper demonstrates how these imported foods (and the cultural cuisines in which they exist in) are an embodiment of legacies of American militarism and colonialism, while also bringing into conversation agency and ingenuity demonstrated by Sāmoan people. As a result, this thesis foregrounds militarized foodways (via its utilization of food imports) as an avenue to highlight the connection between the militarization of American Sāmoa and chronic health conditions experienced by Sāmoans living in the U.S.

### *Acknowledgments*

Without the support and trust from everyone, this project would not exist, so from the bottom of my heart, I thank you all and wish nothing but the absolute best for you all. Thank you first and foremost to my family, because without them, this thesis project would not exist nor would I be the person I am today. Thank you Prof. Flores and Profa Mayes for your guidance, support, and faith in my project and me; I do not know if words could properly encapsulate just how much your confidence in me as a scholar impacted me, but please know that without you two, I doubt I would have had the confidence to finish this project. Thank you to KT, CP, and my beloved family members who took time to share and trust me with their stories. Thank you to those at Pomona College's Asian American Resource Center (AARC), American Studies Department, and all of the professors and mentors who not only provided me with the tools to engage with this topic, but created the spaces for me to grow as a person throughout this process and beyond. Thank you to my friends whose love and joy sustained me, preventing insecurities to chip away at my confidence.

### *Introduction*

When my dad's family hosts celebrations, there tends to be a plethora of Sāmoan home cooked food present. One of the first meals I vividly remember eating at these family gatherings was sapaui (Samoan chop suey). The name, texture, and ingredients of this dish always held me in awe. I enjoyed eating it but I was confused because the meat used in the dish was unfamiliar to me. I eventually learned that the meat I consumed was canned corned beef. I realized how pervasive canned meat products (corned beef, spam, and vienna sausages) are in the Sāmoan cuisine I so cherished and embraced.

Cultural outsiders would say that tinned meats, among other non-indigenous foods, cause the health disparities (diabetes, high cholesterol, cancer, etc.) seen in our diaspora communities; essentially, we and our foods are to blame for health problems. I believed this once; after all, research showed that tinned meats, for example, due to their high concentrations of fat, sodium, and/or preservatives, increased the likelihood of developing certain health problems. I even experienced this reality in my own life. Although in high school, I was a varsity soccer athlete who was generally healthy in every sense of the word, I took and still take medication for my high cholesterol. At the same time as I grappled with this revelation, I noticed how pervasive the U.S. military was and continues to be in Pacific Islander communities. Indeed, imperialism, occupation, and geopolitical interests are why there are “two” Sāmoas to this day. Worse still, Pacific Islanders, especially Sāmoans from American Sāmoa, get recruited into the military at extremely high rates because they are viewed as “physically strong,” a justification that keeps the military interested in Sāmoans as recruits. Once I understood the centrality of imperialism and militarism in Sāmoan history and how often Sāmoans prioritize joining the military over the

pursuit of a college degree, for example, my view of the military as an institution shifted critically.

By the time I got to college, I became interested in how health outcomes and militarization connected to my Pasifika identity. Initially, I thought these concepts were divorced of one another; whereas I had mixed emotions about the exploitative nature of the military, I was curious to explore ways to bridge health inequities I saw in Pasifika communities in regards to the prevalence of detrimental health conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, high cholesterol, etc. Because these health conditions impact my family and me, I sought out classes that discussed health from either a sociological or ethnic studies lens.

I eventually learned that heavy U.S. military presence led to the introduction of certain staples I saw growing up, including spam, cans of wahoo, and corned beef. For me, the existence and incorporations of these foods into cultural dishes became a visible manifestation of U.S. military occupation in American Sāmoa. This realization was liberating for me, because it helped me remove the stigma around the food and people in my culture; we're not inherently unhealthy, but rather this is a manifestation of how harmful outside military presence is towards health. This issue runs deeper than simply buying "healthier" foods, most of which tend to be inaccessible for those living in the diaspora considering locations and pricing.

In college, I turned to Ethnic Studies to help me make sense of my experiences and critical take on the impact of the U.S. military on Sāmoan lifeways and health outcomes. For the first time ever, I saw Pacific Islander issues and histories explicitly central to a course. The class exposed me to various ways in which U.S. militarism can target health, as well as various ways Indigenous resilience can shape. In another class, I considered foodways as a vessel for militarization's influence on a nation. In yet another class, I engaged in conversations that

explicitly linked food with health outcomes and how, at the same time, food cultures are sites of struggle for Indigenous peoples. With the help of the insights offered by Ethnic Studies, I concluded that the U.S. military has perpetuated harm on American Sāmoa, causing the chronic health conditions and poor public health outcomes for Sāmoans in diaspora. In this thesis, I will show when and how the militarization of American Sāmoa intervened on the life chances and health outcomes of Sāmoans, in diaspora. I argue that imported food serves as the gateway.

“Militarized foodways” encapsulates the dynamic between the militarization of American Sāmoa, chronic health conditions Sāmoans experience living in the U.S., and the role of imported food. Imported food falls under foodways, since foodways capture both the production and consumption of food. Thus, foodways prompts people to consider how these imported foods became staples. The “militarized” preceding foodways explicitly reminds people that these foods tie back to a legacy of military presence on the islands. The prevalence of the chronic health conditions in Sāmoan communities are contingent on these militarized foodways. With that in mind, the thesis I formally propose is that militarized foodways illuminate how the militarization of American Sāmoa and chronic health conditions Sāmoans experience living in the United States are interconnected, utilizing imported food as an entryway to this discussion.

For my study, I examined archival documents,<sup>1</sup> and conducted interviews with Sāmoan women connected to public health and with family members. For the interviews, I reached out to KT and CP<sup>2</sup> because they were relatively local and I knew about the health-related work they have done for the Pasifika community in the Southern California region. I also wanted to hear from Sāmoan women with similar identities and experiences to myself. With family members, I discussed the dishes I consumed growing up, and I wanted to include these since my project came out of

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<sup>1</sup> I examined documents from the Naval Administration of American Sāmoa, housed at the National Archives in San Bruno, California: RG284 Records of Government of American Samoa, National Archives, San Bruno, CA.

<sup>2</sup> These are pseudonyms.



reflections growing up. My secondary sources include video-audio materials, health data, and scholarly work.. The video-audio materials (podcasts, PBS episodes, documentaries, etc.) allowed me to connect the colonialism in American Sāmoa with histories of colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, and in Asia. Health data came from the CDC and reports that were specifically sharing Pasifika data. A rich scholarship in Pasifika Studies provided content and theoretical frameworks.

Hopefully by putting American Sāmoa’s history (specifically its time under naval administration and eventual shift into becoming an unincorporated territory of the United States) in conversation with current health conditions, it will illuminate how the militarization of American Sāmoa is interconnected with health problems Sāmoans living in the States experience. For context, when discussing militarization, I am using it to refer to the “step-by-step process by which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, or derives its value from the military as an institution or militaristic criteria.”<sup>3</sup> Militarization is a process that is borne out of militarism – an “ideology that a nation should maintain and be ready to use its strong military capabilities to advance its national interests.”<sup>4</sup> In this case, I am discussing the militarization of American Sāmoa as a result of American militarism.

Furthermore, it is important to position militarization in conversation with colonialism. Shigematsu and Camacho position “militarization as an extension of colonialism and its gendered and racialized processes.”<sup>5</sup> This essentially means that militarization is another avenue that colonialism can exist in. Additionally, placing militarization under colonialism (an ongoing

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph H. Genz et al., “Framing Militarism and Nuclear Testing in the Pacific” in *Volume 1 of Teaching Oceania Series, Militarism and Nuclear Testing in the Pacific* (Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa, 2019): 3. <http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/42430>.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, “Introduction: Militarized Currents, Decolonizing Futures” in *Militarized Currents: Towards a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.

process) recognizes the significance of history and how nothing exists in a vacuum. Considering how “colonial histories constitute the conditions of possibility for ongoing forms of militarization,” this placement serves an essential role when discussing how the history of military presence in American Sāmoa still affects Sāmoans today.<sup>6</sup>

To link militarization and health, it is helpful to view how food can serve as an embodiment of militarization. For example, *budae jjigae* (“army base stew”) in South Korea is an embodiment of “militarized occupation and precarity, as well as impoverished survival.”<sup>7</sup> This dish came about in 1950 (same time frame as the import records for Sāmoa I discussed earlier) during the Korean War when “starving Korean civilians scavenged military bases for leftovers, excising Spam and other processed meat from heaps of garbage and mixing their coveted findings with vegetables, noodles, and water to create filling stews.”<sup>8</sup> Spam and other canned meats symbolized “American abundance,” then transforming into a valuable commodity.<sup>9</sup> If dishes like *budae jjigae* can be linked towards American militarism and militarization of a nation, then the case can be made for American Sāmoa — an American territory still possessed by the United States, initially due to naval and military interests and advantages. Considering how many imported foods (that became popularized and more prevalent during times of increased American militarism) were embedded into Sāmoan cuisine, there is a case to be made that some of the dishes are embodiments of a militarized legacy.

The first chapter (“How Easter Sāmoa became American”) presents a brief historical overview of how American Sāmoa became “American” with its current status as an unincorporated territory of the United States. Starting with Sāmoa prior to the partitioning, this

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Crystal Mun-Hye Baik, “The Delicious Taste of Army Base Stew: An Introduction” in *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2020), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 5.

chapter explores the conditions within Sāmoa and American (and other imperial nations') interests in the island nation leading up to the partitioning. Following the partition, the chapter goes through some of the events that occurred during U.S. naval administration tenure and the shift in the power dynamic following that. This chapter concludes with discussing some of the examples in which colonialism had already begun to impact the livelihood of Sāmoans. This chapter serves as a historical overview to ground both the militarization of American Sāmoa (that persists to today) and how pervasive these legacies remain. When thinking back to "militarized foodways" as an integral concept of my thesis, this chapter provides the history behind why these foodways are militarized.

With the first chapter more explicitly connected to the militarized part of "militarized foodways," the second chapter ("Militarization's Impact on Health") focuses more on the foodways part, as well as the consequences of militarized foodways. The first section comprises two segments around food. The first segment compiles a few Sāmoan recipes from my family. The intent behind this is to demonstrate that the claim of these imported products becoming cultural cuisine is not something theoretical or abstract, but something both tangible and currently occurring. Additionally, I include the recipes as a nod towards ingenuity, since in order for these foods to become embedded, it required creativity to first create these dishes; furthermore, every family has their own spin on it, so I also want to highlight the creativity of my relatives who generously shared their recipes with me. The second segment (based upon anthropological work and import catalogs during the time) discusses the evolution of what is considered Sāmoan food, initially starting off with crops and animals indigenous to the land then later incorporating common imported products from overseas. This first component demonstrates how cultural continuity and agency are still present within these militarized foodways.

The second component focuses more on the health outcomes we are seeing today. This component bases itself around the interviews I held with KT and CP. The main three questions I constructed this section around were “how did you get to where you are today,” “in your opinion, what are the common threads and issues plaguing Samoan communities health wise or when considering public health,” and “in your opinion, would you say that the health problems we are seeing connect back to militarization of American Samoa.” Alongside their responses to the second question (“in your opinion, what are the common threads and issues plaguing Samoan communities health wise/when considering public health”), I also share various health statistics that coincide with their response. This second component calls into attention the ramifications of militarized foodways, specifically on how they impact our susceptibility to chronic health conditions and how these chronic health conditions (that came as a result) exacerbate other illnesses, such as COVID-19. In combination, both components of the second chapter complicate the space that the outcomes of militarized foodways occupy; occurring in this space is both cultural continuity that serves as a tether to Sāmoan culture and embodied harm that continues to negatively impact our communities.

The conclusion opens up with how I landed on the title of my thesis, following everything I had written prior. I also include more on my reflections following my discussions with both KT and CP, specifically around health and aspirations moving forward. Taking Tuck’s *Suspending Damage: A Letter To Communities* and Tuck and Yang’s “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” into consideration, I continue to reflect further on what I wrote leading up to that point. While this thesis is academic in nature, at the end of the day, it is still my personal journey, exploration, and reflection on this topic.

### *How Eastern Sāmoa became “American”*

In this chapter, I focus on the period from 1820-1951, with the bulk of my documentation from the period of the naval administration’s colonial rule in American Sāmoa from 1899-1951. The existence of (an) “American” Sāmoa essentially boils down to colonial interests fueled by military intrigue. Prior to 1899, Sāmoa was one nation; then, in 1899, American Sāmoa and Independent Sāmoa (formerly known as Western Sāmoa) were created. American Sāmoa continues to be linked with the United States as an unincorporated territory. I discuss the circumstances that led to the creation of , two Sāmoas. “Naval Administration” goes over the legal and military implementations that occurred during the U.S. Navy’s stint as the leading governing body in American Sāmoa. The final section details how the seeds of militarization were planted and caused a slight cultural shift during the 1899-1951 time period. Although the final section hints at my main argument, this chapter essentially serves as background needed for my main argument (militarization of Sāmoa). This chapter functions as a historical overview to understand why the current foodways associated with Sāmoan culture have a militarized quality to them, thus linking the militarized foodways back to when United States militarism prevalent during the creation of American Sāmoa as an U.S. territory.

#### **Sāmoa as One**

Sāmoa (as one) was one of many island nations based in Oceania, or the South Pacific region. If considering Oceania’s subregions (Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia), Sāmoa fits in the Polynesian category, with “language, physical characteristics, culture, and mythology” used as identifiable markers for cultural outsiders (for reference, these subregions were categorized and named by Europeans).<sup>10</sup> Unlike (white) American society (where individualism

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<sup>10</sup> J.A.C Gray, “The Sāmoan Islands and People” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 13.

is a celebrated attribute), Sāmoan culture emphasized (and continues to still emphasize) community.

One important cultural value rooted in a collective sense of action is Samoans' conceptualization of land. As elsewhere, land served as “the basis of the economy,” but was not regarded as an object that existed outside of community and familial relations nor was land connected to any notion of individual wealth based on overuse.<sup>11</sup> The relationship Sāmoans had and continue to have with land was reciprocal (caring for the land as the land provided for them), and “when a branch of a family acquired new lands, it joined them to the original family holdings.”<sup>12</sup>

The centrality of relationships with reference to land is most exemplified in Sāmoans' social structure. A *matai* (chief) is connected to his or her *aiga* (extended family, clan) through reciprocity. It is expected that people in their respective *aiga* remain loyal to their *matai* and it is equally expected that the *matai* will dutifully serve and represent their *aiga*. This sentiment is clearly expressed in the Sāmoan proverb: “O le ala i le pule o le tautua (the path to leadership is through service).” Seeing as *matais* are selected by (adult) members of the *aiga*, the demonstration of community involvement signals a cultural value emphasizing the collective.<sup>13</sup>

In each village, the *matais* who resided there formed a *fono* (council). These *fonos* gathered to make decisions on behalf of the village, as well as perform oversight of the rectifying of misdeeds. “Anti-social acts” refers to crimes that “involved the entire family group of the injured party and that of the perpetrator,” such as adultery, assault, malicious mischief, murder, and theft.<sup>14</sup> Folks tended to seek “compromise settlements;” if the family of the victim wanted to

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<sup>11</sup> J.A.C Gray, “The Social Organization of Sāmoa” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Gray, “The Social Organization of Sāmoa,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 25.

settle things peacefully (versus violent retribution), the family of the perpetrator (led by the matai) would visit the the home of the victim's matai to "pay a forfeit of food and fine mats," as well as perform an *ifoga* (a public apology).<sup>15</sup> When performing an *ifoga*, "the visitors were required to sit down before the house of the offended matai and await his" acceptance of their apology.<sup>16</sup> When the *matai* accepted the apology (after whatever time allotment he deemed acceptable for the offending *aiga* to perform the *ifoga*), this was an indication of "his willingness to hear what they had to say," typically followed up the *matai* of the perpetrator apologizing on behalf of his or her family.<sup>17</sup>

The ordeal was resolved when the *matai* of the victim (believing that the matai of the perpetrator's family was abased enough, demonstrated genuine regret, and offered sufficient restitution) signaled the conclusion of the ordeal and the two parties began "a feast of reconciliation."<sup>18</sup> This method worked sufficiently and was applied to the crimes under the "anti-social acts" (save for adultery, where in most cases it was resolved privately); once "guilt was established," the *fono* delivered punishment for the culprit which could include being: stripped naked and forced to walk through the entire village, required to sit out in the beaming sun nude for hours, or bounded to a post out in the sun for hours without water.<sup>19</sup> If the crime was murder, then the punishment would be a combination of some or all of the following: placement of the criminal in a canoe out to sea (to improbably sail out to another island), "total destruction of the criminal's family's dwellings and their agricultural lands, prohibiting the family from farming and fishing, and banishment."<sup>20</sup> This judicial process was embedded into the *fa'aSāmoa* (the Sāmoan way) and will be of significance later in this chapter.

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<sup>15</sup> Gray, "The Social Organization of Sāmoa," in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>19</sup> Gray, "The Social Organization of Sāmoa," in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Colonialism began in Sāmoa, as elsewhere, with religion. The first Christian organization to come to Sāmoa was the London Missionary Society (LMS). Established in 1795, this interdenominational Protestant Christian body was already firmly entrenched in Oceania before it reached Sāmoa. Reverend John Williams, “an LMS missionary stationed in Tahiti,” fixed his sights on Sāmoa and Fiji initially in 1824; in 1830, he departed from Rarotonga (located in the Cook Islands) and towards Sāmoa and Fiji.<sup>21</sup> Religious indoctrination was heavily prevalent from 1820 – 1847, culminating with “the introduction of the Christian religion into the islands.”<sup>22</sup> Later in the 1800s, Wesleyanism, Seventh Day Adventists, and Latter Day Saints also “appeared upon the scene,” and the four groups competed against each other to convert Sāmoans into their religious beliefs.<sup>23</sup> By mid-century, the focus shifted towards the conflict between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism (with missionaries from the respective camps wanting their own religion to take root in Sāmoa).<sup>24</sup>

Missionaries learned how to communicate in Sāmoan and created an alphabet structure based on their understanding of Sāmoan phonetics, thus transforming Sāmoan into a written language. Primarily motivated by their desire to convert more Sāmoans to the church and encourage Sāmoans to read the Bible, missionaries created the concept of literacy.<sup>25</sup> In short, the Sāmoan alphabet (still used today) was born out of colonial desires to convert Sāmoans to Christianity.

These religious entities did not limit themselves to just the religious spheres of Sāmoan society. The LMS were actually drawn to some of the economic trade aspects involving imports and exports. At this time, popularly demanded imported items included material for clothing

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Gray, “The Introduction of Christianity,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 32.

<sup>23</sup> Gray, “The Introduction of Christianity,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 39.



(needle and thread for women to create the clothes), knives, guns, and alcohol, while originally exchanged via bartering for local products, shifted towards money as a medium in 1839 (also as a result of explicit foreign influence).<sup>26</sup> The main Sāmoan exports around this time were coconut oil and copra. The coconut oil export began in 1824 where it soon “became their major source of revenue when Europe and America, which needed oils for candles and soap, found the oil of the coconut suitable for the purpose.”<sup>27</sup> Copra (the coconut’s dried meat) was “the most convenient and economical coconut product for shipment” overseas.<sup>28</sup> Copra was the product that the LMS was heavily invested and interested in. Specifically, “the first ship of the LMS (the *Camden*) [cruised] among the islands on the business of the society, often [being] the only vessel to call at remote places and accepted passengers and cargo as a public service” along the way.<sup>29</sup> Hence, alongside inserting themselves into the religious sphere, missionaries (particularly the LMS) were also involved in Sāmoan economic trade, especially the overseas aspect.

Foreign intervention and interests staked in Sāmoan government affairs occurred well before the actual partitioning of Sāmoa. The United States involved themselves more directly in this aspect. United States intervention (or interest) began in the 1870s with the arrival of Colonel A.B. Steinberger. Designated a “special agent” by the American government, his official role was to essentially “study and report upon the people, products, and harbors of Sāmoa.”<sup>30</sup> Implications of cultural chauvinism aside, his assigned role should have delegated him to the background of Sāmoan government affairs. Yet, that did not happen. Arriving in Sāmoa (Tutuila specifically) in 1873, he heavily involved himself in Sāmoan political affairs (which the United

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<sup>26</sup> Gray, “Early Commerce,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 53-54.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

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

<sup>29</sup> Gray, “Early Commerce,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 55.

<sup>30</sup> Gray, “First Sāmoan Experiments in Government,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 60.

States was well aware of, since he included some of his activities in the reports) and advocated for recognition of the “new” Sāmoan and for Sāmoa to be annexed.<sup>31</sup> According to Gray, how he presented himself to the Sāmoans is unclear: “exactly what Steinberger represented himself to be is unknown, but it is doubtful that he was modest as to the extent of his authority, and his return aboard a warship of the United States Navy enhanced his prestige and opened the way for him to take an active part in local affairs, which he was not slow to accept... [and] took charge of the government of Sāmoa.”<sup>32</sup> For example, he took it upon himself to “abolish the double-kingship” system that had been put in place prior to his arrival and instead create an allotment system where every four years the title of “kingship” alternates between the Malietoa and Tupua families.<sup>33</sup> This demonstrates American proclivity for involving themselves deeply in foreign affairs and taking over other nation’s agencies in their governing bodies. For example, the United States was still in charge of Cuba when Cuba elected their first president in 1902.<sup>34</sup> Other examples include Guāhan (where Naval Administration also occurred around the same time period) and Grenada (where the U.S. invaded Grenada in the 1980s to assassinate Maurice Bishop and put forth a leader they deemed capable to govern).<sup>35,36</sup> These occurrences place American Sāmoa in the lineage of the American empire’s foreign interventions.

These inclinations were not individuals seeking personal control over others but signs of how embedded imperialism was in Sāmoa. The United States became even more deeply

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<sup>31</sup> Gray, “First Sāmoan Experiments in Government,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 62

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Gray, “First Sāmoan Experiments in Government,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 62.

<sup>34</sup> *Black in Latin America*. Episode 2, “Cuba: The Next Revolution.” written by Henry Louis Gates Jr. aired April 26, 2011, on PBS.

<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/black-in-latin-america/featured/black-in-latin-america-full-episode-cuba-the-next-revolution/219/>

<sup>35</sup> War For Guam, directed by Frances Negron-Lutaner, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moBvSySdCHs>.

<sup>36</sup> Rund Abdelfatah et al., “Grenada: Nobody’s Backyard,” Throughline (NPR, July 29, 2021), <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/27/1021236625/grenada-nobodys-backyard>.

entrenched in Sāmoan political and foreign affairs following the Lackawanna Treaty in 1881 (which established an uneasy peace following a civil war that broke out in Sāmoa).<sup>37</sup> Imperialism was not something unique to only the United States; British and German imperial interests were also palpable in Sāmoa. For instance, when there were “two governments in Sāmoa: that of Laupepa, recognized by Britain and the United States, and that of the Germans’ Tamasese,” the fact these nations backed different groups and got involved indicates that these alliances were made with prioritizing which faction would be more beneficial to the colonial power.<sup>38</sup> Instigations like this fed into the circumstances that led to the partitioning of Sāmoa.

### **Actual Partition**

The United States, Germany, and Britain precipitated the conditions leading to Sāmoa’s partitioning ten years prior. All three countries’ interest in Sāmoa stemmed from what they considered to be the strategic military positioning the islands hold – an example of an inter-imperial rivalry. Inter-imperial rivalry stems from the broader inter-imperial relations, defined as “the relations of cooperation, competition, and conflict between empires, including subaltern attempts at creating spaces for maneuver and agency between them.”<sup>39</sup>

Using neutrality to alleviate tensions and hostilities between these colonial nations interested in the Sāmoan archipelago, they signed the General Act of Berlin 1889; this act sought to preserve “independent and autonomous government for the islands” under the conditions laid out by these three countries.<sup>40</sup> One of the conditions laid out in this agreement was kingship.

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<sup>37</sup> Gray, “American Entanglement in Sāmoa,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 70.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 73-74.

<sup>39</sup> Augusto Espiritu, “Inter-Imperial Relations, the Pacific, and Asian American History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (2014): 238, <https://doi.org/10.1525/phr.2014.83.2.238>.

<sup>40</sup> “German Aggression in Sāmoan Islands | US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives,” [https://history.house.gov/Records-and-Research/Listing/pm\\_028/](https://history.house.gov/Records-and-Research/Listing/pm_028/).

When Malietoa Laupepa passed, Sāmoa had to pick a new leader to fulfill that role, and that is where conflict arose. There were two people proposed to take on that leadership role: Malietoa Tanumafili and Tui Atua Mata'afa.<sup>41</sup> Tanumafili supporters and Mata'afa supporters' rivalry was so entrenched that it led to a civil war within the island nation.<sup>42</sup> When Germany proposed the dispatch of a new international commission to Sāmoa (that the United States and Britain agreed with), the commissioners involved agreed upon two fundamental propositions: "first, that the kingship was a concept entirely foreign to Sāmoan thinking, and that it could therefore be abolished with no injury to Sāmoan feeling, and, second, that it was idle to expect the Sāmoans to keep the peace as long as they were armed."<sup>43</sup> Prioritizing the latter, the three colonial powers invited Mata'afa and Tanumafili separately into their naval quarters, essentially threatening explicitly hostile naval and military intervention if both parties did not end the war and surrender guns.<sup>44</sup> What makes the coercion even more startling is that in the same breath these colonial powers are making these threats, they are also bemoaning how much it hurts their hearts that Sāmoans are dying as a result of this civil war.<sup>45</sup> If Sāmoans dying truly mattered to them, then why would they threaten to escalate more violence towards Sāmoan bodies? It becomes apparent that their concern with the civil war going on had less to do with being Samaritans and more to do with the fact that the civil war made it harder for these nations to maintain their colonial control over Sāmoa.

Both Mata'afa and Tanumafili were coerced to agree with the conditions laid out, prioritizing communal survival over risking whether the foreign nations would follow through with their threats of strong-arm tactics. The formal disarmament took place May 31, 1899, where

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<sup>41</sup> J.A.C Gray, "The Partition of Sāmoa," in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 99.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Gray, "The Partition of Sāmoa," in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 100.

Sāmoans gave over to the foreign nations 4,000 guns (initially obtained through imports initiated and expanded by the LMS) — therefore concluding the second proposition put forth.<sup>46</sup> That left the issue of abolishing kingship. To accomplish this aspect, the commissioners declared Malietoa Tanumafili as king, then subsequently convinced him to resign.<sup>47</sup> Once the kingship was vacant, from June 10, 1899, the commission installed a provisional government composed of the consuls, with the German, Dr Heinrich Solf, as the new president of the Council of the Municipality of Apia, to act as executive officer.<sup>48</sup>

During the time that the commission carried out their two propositions (and following the time in which they achieved those), the three foreign nations continued to figure out how they wanted to divide the Sāmoan nation amongst themselves. They eventually agreed that Tutuila, Aunu'u, and Manu'a would be under American control and all of the rest of Sāmoa was placed under Germany's jurisdiction. In short, the United States claimed the Eastern parts of Sāmoa and Germany the Western parts. In exchange for not having any part of Sāmoa as a territory, Germany gave up their land stakes in Tonga, Solomon Islands, and in West Africa (this exchange happening concurrently with the Scramble for Africa). This agreement was made official on 14th November 1899, with a subsequent convention between the three arranged on 2 December 1899.<sup>49</sup> From that day onward, Sāmoa has remained partitioned.

Happening during the same year was the construction of the naval station at Pago Pago. Tracing back to at least 1878, the “plan to construct a naval station in addition to the coaling station on Pago Pago Bay [was] formulated by the Navy Department.”<sup>50</sup> Besides the strategic location of Pago Pago Bay, the defensive attributes its entrance held appealed to the U.S. Navy;

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<sup>46</sup> Gray, “The Partition of Sāmoa,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 101.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Gray, “The Partition of Sāmoa,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 101-2.

<sup>50</sup> J.A.C Gray, “The United States Naval Station, Tutuila,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 105.

with two rocky promontories and the mountain above the Roman Catholic Mission at Lepua (used in this case as a “navigational landmark”) dominating the entrance in tandem, “it was desirable that [the land] be owned by the navy.”<sup>51</sup> This led to the American navy purchasing the land with Congress appropriated funds, which took 18 months to accomplish since they had to compensate both Sāmoan families and Polynesian Land Company and “each Sāmoan family concerned had to agree unanimously to the sale, and the American owners or their states had to be contacted” before construction could take place.<sup>52</sup> In 1900, the United States officially declared their colonial hold on American Sāmoa via the naval administration. Then Pres. McKinley stated that: ““the island of Tutuila of the Sāmoan Group and all other islands of the group east of longitude 171 west of Greenwich, are hereby placed under the control of the Department of the Navy for a naval station. The secretary of the Navy shall take such steps as may be necessary to establish the authority of the United states, and to give the islands the necessary protection.””<sup>53</sup> Through a Deed of Cession (“in which the Chiefs ceded their island and its small neighbor, Aunu’u, to the United States”), the United States placed Tutuila under their naval administration’s authority.<sup>54</sup>

The Deed of Cession was signed by the *matais* at the time and addressed to Commander Tilley. In the document, they declared that “only the Government of the United States of America shall rule in Tutuila and Manua,” explicitly swore off ever wanting to be under another foreign power’s jurisdiction, and thanked the foreign nations for placing them under America control.<sup>55</sup> One part of the deed that I found especially provocative is the line:

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Gray, “The United States Naval Station, Tutuila,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 106.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>54</sup> Gray, “The United States Naval Station, Tutuila,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 108.

<sup>55</sup> The Deed of Cession is reproduced in “The United States Naval Station, Tutuila,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 112-117.

“that in order to set aside all possible doubts in the future concerning our true desires at this time on account of the Rule of the United States of America in Tutuila and Manua, we now, rightly appointed according to the customs of Sāmoa to be representatives of all different districts in Tutuila we do confirm all the things done by the Great Powers Tutuila, we do also cede and transfer to the government of the United States of America the island of tutuila and all things there to rule and to protect it.”<sup>56</sup>

In this written agreement, the *matais* are indirectly addressing whether the cession was something that they consented towards. Something to note is that “there is no [written] record of the negotiations which led to the cession,” so the language used officially in the Deed of Cession calls into question the need to emphasize these are “true desires” being expressed.<sup>57</sup> This follows a trend in which treaties, between a colonial power and an Indigenous group, only reflect the surface while omitting “oral and symbolic exchanges and acts that followed.”<sup>58</sup> While it is possible to see that *matais* from different sections of Tutuila independently acted on it, the time frame for when and location for where the document was produced remain unknown.<sup>59</sup> Some scholars could posit that these were genuine feelings being expressed onto paper (and angle how concepts such as reciprocity are heavily embedded into Sāmoan culture).

I do not think that coercion can be ruled out. Firstly, the United States (and especially their naval administration) tediously wrote down political proceedings, so it remains odd that the negotiations remain unknown. More importantly, considering the circumstances and how the foreign powers carried themselves in 1899 leading towards the partitioning of Sāmoa, it is possible that the production of the Deed of Cession held coercive elements. With the partitioning taking place within the prior year, the knowledge of American naval power, alongside the fact that they surrendered their arms, would have been a consideration that *matais* had when crafting

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Gray, “The United States Naval Station, Tutuila,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 108.

<sup>58</sup> Lisa Brooks, “Namumpum, ‘Our Beloved Kinswoman,’ Saunkskwa of Pocasset: Bonds, Acts, Deeds,” in *Our Beloved Kin, A New History of King Philip’s War* (Yale University Press, 2018), 36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1z27jbr.8>.

<sup>59</sup> Gray, “The United States Naval Station, Tutuila,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 108.

and signing the legal agreement. Even if hypothetical threats were never explicitly made, the fear of said threat could equally be as heavy of a factor of whether to go along with what the document says. Just as it is possible that the language written in this deed was done in good faith, I believe it is very plausible that the *matais* who signed intentionally agreed and/or wrote the specific phrasings as a way to ensure the safety of their community. Similarly to how Malietoa Tanumafili and Tui Atua Mata’afa (while dependent on the other agreeing to the same terms) decisions to end the civil war were influenced by foreign coercion and prioritizing the greater community, the *matais* whose names are listed on the Deed of Cession wanted to prioritize the wellbeing of the Sāmoan community. Furthermore, both examples connect to the overarching concept of Native survival.

### **Naval Administration**

Following both the Deed of Cession and the Tripartite Convention, the United States naval administration was in full effect. When it concerned administering the law, Commander Tilly (who was at the time in charge of the naval administration) put out a Declaration of Form of Government in May of 1900 in which he proclaimed that American laws were enforced and that the commandant “would make all the laws and appoint office holders.”<sup>60</sup>

Existing Sāmoan political structures were contingent on American approval. For example, “any Sāmoan law or custom not in conflict” with American laws would still be observed, and prior “existing Sāmoan political organizations would continue to function” so long as the American commandant allowed for it.<sup>61</sup> This was essentially paternalism, limiting Sāmoan autonomy in how they chose to operate. That said, power was not entirely consolidated by white Americans. For the governorship role in the three sections of American Sāmoa, he placed local

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<sup>60</sup> J.A.C Gray, “The Island Government,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 126.

<sup>61</sup> Gray, “The Island Government,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 126.



authorities in those roles — “the Tui Manu’ā in his own islands, the Tuitele in the western Tutuila, and the Mauga in eastern.”<sup>62</sup> Again, while the fact that a cultural outsider is the one placing Sāmoan figures in leadership roles calls into question the amount of authority afforded to Sāmoan leaders (alongside the general leadership style Tilley demonstrated being autocratic), this move did recognize the need for Sāmoan leaders in the governing body (and the leadership these three demonstrated themselves, as well as being acknowledged by the community as leaders).

Tilley also incorporated Sāmoan folks into participating in the navy. In creating a Sāmoan military organization, “he proposed to enlist Sāmoans as “landsmen” in the Navy or as a marine guard for the naval station.”<sup>63</sup> As a naval officer himself, he viewed this shift positively. Looking back, this could be included as part of the foundation and origin to heavy military presence in American Sāmoa, which is also in connection to disproportionately high military recruitment numbers today. In addition to economic and political influence, the naval administration was also in charge of gathering census data, alongside tracking for birth, deaths, and marriages.

The naval administration emphasized health (specifically sanitation) as one of the categories noted in the census and other political documents they would send to the United States government. Endemic illnesses included “yaws, filariasis, a trachoma-like disease of the eyes, intestinal parasitism, tropical ulcers, and fungus diseases of the skin.”<sup>64</sup> “Common colds, pneumonia, tuberculosis, leprosy, typhoid fever, the dysenteries, tetanus, diphtheria, and gonorrhoea” were most likely brought in by outsiders coming in to live in Sāmoa.<sup>65</sup> Yet, sanitation was the biggest health concern for the naval administration. It was to the point that they would

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 127-128.

<sup>64</sup> J.A.C Gray, “Health,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 164.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

compile information to send back to the U.S., it would be labeled “Public Health and Sanitation.”<sup>66</sup> Even towards the end of the naval administration’s time in American Sāmoa, they listed educating children in “hygiene and sanitation” as one the major health problems.<sup>67</sup> This American hyperfixation on cleanliness of the racialized other was not unique to Sāmoans. For example, American obsession with cleanliness and sanitation fed into the creation of gasoline baths at the U.S-Mexican border, where the American government subjected Mexican migrant workers to kerosene baths, despite knowing the chemicals used were toxic.<sup>68</sup> While the obsessions manifested differently for the two groups, the hyperfixation does signal towards a colonial belief of their (colonial powers) inherent cleanliness, placing everyone outside of that as dirty and in need of purifying.

Also happening during the naval administration’s stint in American Sāmoa were the World Wars. Between the two wars, the governor of American Sāmoa (Stephen Victor Graham – A U.S. navy admiral)’s main concern was the upkeep of the naval station.<sup>69</sup> During WWII, the atmosphere shifted. For a few months, Tutuila held position as the front line of the war effort.<sup>70</sup> The pervasiveness of the military was felt: “the United States Marines are said to have outnumbered” the Indigenous population, and due to “rapid personnel change,” Sāmoans had to deal with men who were either apathetic to their nation or extremely inexperienced men placed into positions of power ranked above them.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “Information on American Sāmoa Transmitted By The United States To The Secretary-General Of The United Nations Pursuant To Article 73 (c) Of The Chapter,” RG284 Records of Government of American Sāmoa, box 5 Record’s of Governor’s Office, series 16 Coded Subject Files 1941-1951, folder 8A Affairs in American Sāmoa 1947-1950 (3 of 3), National Archives, San Bruno, CA: 5.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> *The Dark History of “Gasoline Baths” at the Border*, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkD6QfeRiI8>.

<sup>69</sup> J.A.C Gray, “Between the Wars,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 231.

<sup>70</sup> J.A.C Gray, “World War Two,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 241.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 241-242.

The economy during this time, however, actually experienced a period of expansion. While the copra export had been stalled due to the war, other means of income were flowing into American Sāmoa.<sup>72</sup> The wages paid to Sāmoan marines and those who constructed military projects during the time, as well as American sailors and marines from overseas purchasing from local merchants, brought in a “wave of prosperity” and added to the “government’s custom revenue.”<sup>73</sup> Bank of American Sāmoa’s gross income “climbed from \$9,585.68 in 1940 to \$33,739.65 in 1945, while its assets rose from \$183,339.70 to \$1,800,004 280.70.”<sup>74</sup> Combining all sources of income, the government of American Sāmoa’s revenue “increased from \$87,330.58 in 1941 to \$1,046,430.65 at the end of the war.”<sup>75</sup> This ultimately shifted Sāmoa’s economy more into wage based one, while also placing economic prosperity synonymous with military employment.

Import wise, the war effort also shifted what was popularly demanded. Canned meats are demanded in quantities astronomically higher than the other imports coming into Sāmoa.<sup>76</sup> Prior to the naval administration’s time in Sāmoa, canned meat was not mentioned on import records. The jump towards astronomical numbers did not take place until the World Wars occurred and when American Sāmoa was further militarized. To sum it up, the wars (especially World War II specifically) further expanded the militarization process occurring in Sāmoa, most clearly seen through the different ways it impacted the economy.

Following WWII, American Sāmoa (alongside Guåhan) were transferred over from naval administrations to the U.S. Department of Interior. “The United States Department of the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 244.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 244-245.

<sup>74</sup> Gray, “World War Two,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 245.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> “Information on American Sāmoa Transmitted By The United States To The Secretary-General Of The United Nations Pursuant To Article 73 (c) Of The Chapter,” RG284 Records of Government of American Sāmoa, box 5 Record’s of Governor’s Office, series 16 Coded Subject Files 1941-1951, folder 8A Affairs in American Sāmoa 1947-1950 (3 of 3), National Archives, San Bruno, CA: 15.

Interior, responsible for Indian affairs and territories, had long been interested in American Sāmoa;” this interest only grew following the conclusion to the second world war.<sup>77</sup> This resulted in animosity between the U.S. Navy Department and the Department of Interior.<sup>78</sup> The animosity was born out of the Department of Interior (directed by Secretary Harold L. Ickes) spearheaded a campaign directed towards “supplanting the Navy in Sāmoa and other islands after WWII.”<sup>79</sup> This conflict was eventually resolved in the summer of 1947 when “the Secretaries of the State, War, Navy, and Interior Departments jointly recommended to President Harry S Truman that responsibility for American Sāmoa, along with Guam and the Trust Territories, be vested in the Interior Department.”<sup>80</sup> Roughly two years later (May 1949), “the president directed the Secretaries of the Navy and of the Interior to concert plans for the transfer, and they, by joint memorandum, agreed upon 1 July 1951 as the date for the changeover in the case of American Sāmoa,” ending the naval administration’s time in American Sāmoa.<sup>81</sup> It should be noted that (unsurprisingly) Sāmoans in American Sāmoa were not consulted on what they desired for the status of their nation or provided space to give input on the matter.

### **Beginning of Militarization’s Pervasiveness**

Although my thesis aims to discuss how pervasive militarization is even today, it is important to note that the legacy and impacts of militarization stem back to the years that the naval administration had American Sāmoa under its jurisdiction.

*Fa’aSāmoa* translates back to “way of Sāmoa,” referring to the Sāmoan way of living. Rather than this being a cultural practice, *fa’aSāmoa* is embedded into the culture. During the naval administration’s reign in American Sāmoa, there were instances where the *fa’aSāmoa* was

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<sup>77</sup> J.A.C Gray, “Transfer to the Interior Department,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 257.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>81</sup> Gray, “Transfer to the Interior Department,” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 257.

chipped away by the administration. I am going to focus on two: “The Case of the Skipjack” and “The Ipu of the Tui Manu’a.”

The skipjack situation was the “first direct conflict between the laws and customs of Sāmoa and the laws of the United States.”<sup>82</sup> This case stems from a fishing incident in Tualatai County. When fishing, there are certain protocols for whether the fishermen can eat the fish or has to deliver it to the village’s high chief (to which the high chief decides how to do the portions).<sup>83</sup> If the fish is *sa*, then it is “forbidden to all except the high chief.”<sup>84</sup> One of the fish categorized into the *sa* label is skipjack.

Fagiema (a man living in Tualatai County) went fishing and happened to catch a skipjack. His duty was to deliver said fish to the village high chief (which in this case was High Chief Letuli), however, he instead took it home for his family to eat. By chance, High Chief Letuli happened to pass by when Fagiema’s family was in the process of cooking the fish. When registering what he was witnessing, Letuli acted promptly with the assistance of the young men he directed; “he condemned Fagiema and his family to either exile or starvation” via burning Fagiema’s house to the ground, uprooting all the taro and banana patches the family had, evicting the family from the community, and assuring that the family could not farm or fish in the community region for the foreseeable future.<sup>85</sup> Given the situation, this was well within Letuli’s rights as a high chief.

Following this event, Fagiema fled to Leone to seek refuge under High Chief Tuitele’s protection. With High Chief Tuitele filling the governorship role of the Western part of Tutuila, High Chief Tuitele held seniority over High Chief Letuli. After Letuli ignored Tuitele’s

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<sup>82</sup> J.A.C Gray, “The Case of the Skipjack” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 132.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Gray, “The Case of the Skipjack” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 132.

summons, Tuitele reported the matter to the Commandment, leading to Tilley calling for Letuli's arrest.<sup>86</sup> The end result of the court ruling (at the naval station) was that Letuli was found guilty of improper actions and was forced to make restitutions to Fagiema, as well as be stripped of his high chiefly functions during the year where he was sent to Pago Pago Bay; Fagiema was found guiltless.<sup>87</sup>

This series of events, which involved U.S. military/judicial intervention in what had ostensibly been safeguarded and time-honored practices, demonstrate the covert ways U.S. militarization to alter Sāmoan ways of living and being at two levels; at the level of archival/historical documentation and at the level of everyday practice. For one, from the naval administration's perspective, this case was not worthy enough to document at the time of its occurrence. There are no records of the court proceeding transcript and was not mentioned in official correspondence until 1928, roughly twenty years afterwards. It was mentioned here in reference to a three-way conversation between Governor Graham, Mauga Moi Moi, and the Tuitele of that time frame.<sup>88</sup> Specifically, Mauga Moi Moi traces the disorder occurring in Tutuila in 1928 back to the skipjack incident, and when Governor Graham asks for details, Moi Moi essentially explains the gist of what happened.<sup>89</sup> According to Mauga and concurred by Tuitele, the court case's outcome caused "the authority of the high chiefs in Tutuila had been publicly undermined by the Americans, and resistance to the Sāmoans' own duly constituted authorities had been encouraged" for the first time.<sup>90</sup>

Additionally, if going back to the time of the case, there was a large acceptance of the case's verdict when it was delivered.<sup>91</sup> Between that, High Chief Tuitele (of that time)'s decision

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>88</sup> Gray, "The Case of the Skipjack" in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 134.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 133.

to have the naval administration step in, and Fagiema's actions in the first place, these actions all imply the normalization of military rule and presence in American Sāmoa, signaling something akin to a different era. While the motivations behind Fagiema's actions are unknown, he definitely knew what he should have done; it is possible that American values of individualism might have started to bleed over into American Sāmoa, rationalizing why Fagiema kept the skipjack to himself versus performing his duty. High Chief Tuitele's reliance and ultimate offloading onto the American naval administration implies that he recognized their authority as supreme, even in culturally specific matters. The widespread acceptance of the verdict also signals the same recognition of American authority over Sāmoans. My rationalizations of all these actions are all things I am simply postulating, since with no record of the court case transcript, it is impossible to pinpoint exactly what the motivations were. However, this still does not change the fact that these actions came as a result of militarization of American Sāmoa, since the court case outcome was only possible due to the circumstances at the time. Or, that it was deemed "ok" to bring in U.S. authorities if it created opportunities to upset the balance of power toward one community over the other.

Another instance that chipped away at the *fa'asāmia* was the situation surrounding the *ipu* (cup) of the Tui Manu'a that occurred in 1901. To give proper context, it is imperative to note that while Tilley had split and made the three governorship roles equal in the eye of (American) law, that was not the case in terms of historical precedence. The Tui Manu'a was historically elevated to a more senior status than both the Tuitele and Mauga Moi Moi of Western and Eastern Tutuila respectively.<sup>92</sup> The conflict was essentially between the Tui Manu'a and Mauga

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<sup>92</sup> J.A.C Gray, "The Ipu of the Tui Manu'a" in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration* (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1960), 140.

Moi Moi, the latter being the one “who precipitated the crisis surrounding a *kava* ceremony” and what would be “the second major clash between American and Sāmoan law and custom.”<sup>93</sup>

*Kava* is a beverage served throughout Polynesia, and within Sāmoa (and Tonga) particularly, the consumption of the beverage is ceremonial.<sup>94</sup> *Kava* is made via digging up, washing, and then drying the root of the *kava* plant.<sup>95</sup> The dried root is then grounded to a sawdust consistency then seeped in water, resulting in a “creamy-colored, non-viscid” liquid.<sup>96</sup> The ceremonial drinking of *kava* is exclusive to *matais* (regardless of gender identity) and folks accepted as their peers (which can include visiting government officials).<sup>97</sup>

The *kava* ceremony held constant components to it as well. The physical materials include “a mixing bowl, a strainer, and a cup.”<sup>98</sup> When considering other folks involved in the ceremony excluding the drinkers (who are seated in the *fale* [house]), there are “a girl or youth who mixes and strains the brew, an assistant who shakes the dregs out of the strainer, a youth or maiden who serves the cup, and finally a caller, a talking chief who acts as master of ceremonies.”<sup>99</sup> There is a deliberate progression pattern on how the ceremony is conducted between the folks receiving the *kava* and the folks helping perform the ceremonial drinking. While there can exist polite improvisations to the ceremony, one aspect that would not fall into this category would be *matai*’s “*kava* titles.” “*Kava* titles” refer to the name of how each *matai*’s specific *kava* cups are known.<sup>100</sup> For example, “Se uga loloa” was the name of the Mauga’s *kava* cup, with “*o le ipu*” (which translates to “the cup”) referring to the cup of the Tui Manu’a.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> J.A.C Gray, “The Ipu of the Tui Manu’a” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 141.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.



Even with *ipu* meaning cup, no one else on Manu'a could refer to the drinking utensil that they would drink *kava* as such, instead using the synonymous *o le taumafa*.<sup>102</sup>

With that, we can shift into the second conflict between *fa'aSāmoa* and American laws. In 1901, Mauga Moi Moi unexpectedly arrived to Manu'a (specifically the island of Ofu) when the High Chief was absent, meaning the *kava* ceremony that needed to be set up in his (Mauga's) honor was set up hastily by the *matai* present.<sup>103</sup> The three known to have participated in the ceremony were Salelepaga (who presided over the ceremony), Talking Chief Lei (who acted as caller), and Paliata (who took on the server role). Once the *kava* ceremony, they proceeded as normal up until Lei stated: "*Aumai se uga loloa*" ("Bring forth the Mauga's personal cup")!<sup>104</sup>

Mauga Moi Moi rejected the *kava*, shocking those in attendance. When asked why, Mauga demanded he be served an *ipu*, citing Romans 13:7 as justification.<sup>105</sup> To the Ofuans, it was transparent that Mauga Moi Moi was intentionally demanding an honor exclusive to the Tui Manu'a.<sup>106</sup> Salelepaga, Lei, and Paliata step out to discuss the matter between themselves on how to proceed. They were aware that the Tu'i Manu'a had made concessions prior, particularly in extending the courtesy of drinking *kava* in an *ipu* to the Commandment and to the Secretary of Native Affairs (where it was called *kovana*).<sup>107</sup> They also surmised that Mauga (aware of these concessions) was attempting to elevate himself to the same level of stature as the Tui Manu'a, since the both of them held governorship positions.<sup>108</sup> They ended up settling on a compromise

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 144. "Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor." - Roman 13:7

<sup>106</sup> J.A.C Gray, "The Ipu of the Tui Manu'a" in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 144.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

— to state out: “*Aumai le ipu o le Kovana*” (Bring forth the governor’s cup)!<sup>109</sup> Mauga Moi Moi accepted the compromise, and the ceremony was complete.

When word reached the Tui Manu’a, he was deeply off-put and set out to punish Salelepaga, Lei, and Paliata. The three of them were set to receive the similar punishment that Chief Letuli delivered to Fagiema (from the skipjack incident above): destruction of property, eviction, and being sent to sail with minimal chance of survival.<sup>110</sup> However, by mere chance of Mr. E.W. Gurr arriving there on unrelated business, the three were not given the ultimate Sāmoan punishment. Arguing that the Tui Manu’a had no authority to deliver out punishment, Gurr directed the Tui Manu’a to settle the matter through the naval court system.<sup>111</sup> Thus, on September 20, 1901, “Matter of Tauanu’u versus Lei, Pailata, and Salelepaga” was held in District Court Number Five.<sup>112</sup> The judges on the case were Gurr, High Chief Tufele, and Talking Chief Tulifua. Taunu’u (the plaintiff) argued that the three on trial should have simply rejected Mauga’s request, knowing better. Additionally, he mentioned that the reason both the Commandant Governor and Secretary of Native Affairs got to receive one was due to two reasons: 1) their elevated status in the government and 2) that they are not Sāmoan (amongst Sāmoans themselves, no one would rank higher than the Tui Manu’a). The case concluded with the following split verdict: the majority verdict (Gurr and Tufele) found none of the defendants guilty, whereas the minority verdict (Tulifua) found Salelepaga (who missed the court case due to illness) guilty, but the others not guilty.<sup>113</sup>

Unlike the reaction in the case involving the skipjack, the Sāmoans’ reaction was “immediate and unfavorable.”<sup>114</sup> Even with many disputes (some of which were taken to court)

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> J.A.C Gray, “The Ipu of the Tui Manu’a” in *Amerika Sāmoa and Its Naval Administration*, 147.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

that happened over the next year, the court decision was still upheld — striking deeply at an ingrained and culturally-complex aspect of the *fa'aSāmoa*.<sup>115</sup> Besides the obvious court trial being a reflection of militarization (the naval administration ran the court system), Mauga Moi Moi's actions reflect how militarization has impacted one's sense of *fa'aSāmoa*. Despite being well aware of the correct protocol, he was emboldened by the American naval administration's existence at American Sāmoa and decided to push the limits.

In the two events, American militarization undercut Sāmoan customs, instead supplanting American traditions and laws as superior. This not only chipped at principles embedded within the *fa'aSāmoa*, but it stripped *matais* of agency and genuine autonomy in decision-making. While some may argue that these avenues being impacted are simply political, it is important to note that the political *is* personal, in that one's politics are informed by their personhood. So, by attacking the political structures within *fa'aSāmoa*, the person's cultural identity also becomes under attack.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 149.

### *Militarization's Impacts on Health*

As we have seen thus far, militarization of Sāmoa occurred primarily through political and judicial means. However, militarization pervaded other aspects of Sāmoan society and became evident in changes in foodways and health outcomes. If viewing certain imported foods as embodiments of militarization, then it becomes easier to connect how adverse health conditions impacting Sāmoans in the present day are linked to the militarization of American Sāmoa. This chapter aims to cover the complicated space that militarized foodways creates when thinking of those in the diaspora.

This chapter is composed of two sections. The first section is titled “Recipes and Food Imports”. I start off with recipes of Sāmoan dishes (that are considered cultural staples) from my family. All of them are personal communications and I list it as is. Then, I shift into discussing food imports and how they shifted Sāmoan diets. With those together, I illuminate two things: 1) how these imports (which connect back to heavy military presence) become adopted into cultural cuisine and 2) inventiveness demonstrated in creating these cultural dishes.

From there, the focus shifts onto the current health ramifications American Sāmoans are experiencing. The second section is listed as “Health Conversations.” This section is a combination of the conversations I had with KT (the deputy director of a national Pacific Islander organization) and CP (a second year PhD candidate at UCLA) – both Sāmoan women with ties to public health – and health data available. In this section, I discuss both Sāmoan specific health data and broader NHPI (Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander) data as well; the data includes various chronic health conditions and COVID-19. For the sake of this conversation, I will primarily be focusing on physical (individual) health and public health in these discussions.

While I do believe health holistically can connect back, considering my time constraint and feasibility, these two are easiest to focus on due to the resources and conversations I had.

It might seem weird to initially broaden this to include NHPI trends. There are two main reasons to include these though. First, from a rudimentary statistical standpoint, Sāmoans are counted within the NHPI label. After all, NHPI serves as an umbrella term for Sāmoans and other Pasifika people living in the United States. While this can and does point towards the lack of data disaggregation, the fact remains that Sāmoans would be counted under the NHPI label. While not all the data completely reflects the Sāmoan experience, I would be remiss to claim that none of it is broadly applicable. Yet, with that being said, there is a reason for why I went from broad (racial category) to narrow); said justification is my second overall reason for broadening to the NHPI label in this chapter.

This methodological approach also draws to Teresia Teaiwa's "s/pacific n/oceans" framework. Defined as politicizing Indigenous epistemologies and ways, this concept "honors the specificities of Islander experience [while] recognizing the generic effects of (neo)colonialism, and are committed to political and cultural cooperation at the regional level."<sup>116</sup> The second third of this theory better articulates my inclusion of health statistics for and justification of including NHPI in this chapter. Those health trends do point towards broader generalizations and experiences with these health ailments. Yet it is imperative to focus and frame the first third of the theory; it is essential to note that these impacts broadly affect both Sāmoans specifically and the broader NHPI community. Hence, my inclusion of broader NHPI statistics is due to it still being representative of Sāmoans in terms of being included within the

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<sup>116</sup> Teresia K. Teaiwa, "Bikinis and Other s/Pacific n/Oceans" in *Militarized Currents: Towards a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Setsuo Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 27.

acronym from the jump and the fact that there are overlaps from how these health detriments impact Sāmoans and other NHPI ethnicities.

To understand why there is an emphasis placed on food in the first segment of this chapter, it is imperative to understand the role of food in Sāmoan (and other Pasifika) communities. There are cultural rituals, community meetings, and celebrations that not only require an abundance of food, but where food is viewed as a connecting link to signify “strengthening family relationships, community ties, and overall group unity and cohesion.”<sup>117</sup> The abundance of food, and the subsequent consumption of the abundance of said food, are positively viewed; it signals that the host has plentiful food to share with the community, and that the community is thankful and appreciating the food. In short, the abundance of food (and the overconsumption) demonstrates respect for both the host and those in community with the one hosting the meal.

The food aspect from the first section connects to conversations around health in the second section when considering these dietary changes. With the urbanization of Sāmoa leading towards a sedentary and market-based lifestyle (versus self sustenance), the products purchased tend to be readily available. The more popular options include “canned fish, Spam, and corned beef as well as flour, sugar, and white rice; when frozen poultry, beef, lamb, or mutton is available in stores, these meats are frequently of low quality.”<sup>118</sup> While I cannot speak for prices in American Sāmoa, canned fish and preserved meat tends to be relatively inexpensive, making them more affordable than other food options that could be viewed as healthier. The cheapness allows for it to be more accessible for families, if thinking of socioeconomic levels. Yet, at the same time, these foods are linked to the increase in non-communicable diseases in the Sāmoan

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<sup>117</sup> Tarcisius Kabutaulaka et al., “Food and Health” in *Volume 3 of Teaching Oceania Series, Health and Environment in the Pacific*, 53.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

(and greater Pasifika population). Non-communicable diseases include health ailments such as “heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and cancer.”<sup>119</sup> While the factors for what contributes to the development of said non-communicable diseases is up in the air, they can be associated with two things: “the shift to a more sedentary lifestyle” (which was brought about during the naval administration and the subsequent time following their leave) and “the adoption of diets rich in fat, sugar, salt, and preservatives” (which can be seen through the increased importations of food products having these elements).<sup>120</sup>

While some would explain these issues as solely individual behaviors contributing to physical health detriments, to do so ignores the systemic and institutionalized faults that contribute to this issue. Through looking at both health equity frameworks and socio-ecological health perspectives, the societal and imperial factors at play are illuminated. A health equity framework examines “how systematic, unequal economic and social conditions impact people’s health,” whereas “a socio-ecological health perspective considers how people’s environmental, social, and political context affects their health.”<sup>121</sup> With the combined usage of the framework and perspective, conversations surrounding health would expand beyond personal choice, and include factors such as epigenetics, commercialization of processed foods, easier accessibility of processed foods (and simultaneous inaccessibility of healthier foods) due to food deserts, and roadblocks to accessing good quality healthcare (to remedy the health conditions that might be present).

Another factor that the expanded viewpoint allows for is how cultural historical trauma impacts health. Coined by Richard Kekuni Blaisdell, “cultural historical trauma” encapsulates

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<sup>119</sup> Tarcisius Kabutaulaka et al., “Health and Wellbeing” in *Volume 3 of Teaching Oceania Series, Health and Environment in the Pacific*, 48.

<sup>120</sup> Tarcisius Kabutaulaka et al., “Health and Wellbeing” in *Volume 3 of Teaching Oceania Series, Health and Environment in the Pacific*, 48.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

the “cumulative effects of colonialism including loss of customary social structures, loss of land, and institutionalized forms of racism and oppression that impact health” negatively experienced by many Indigenous populations.<sup>122</sup> This also includes militarism and military expansion into Oceania, as seen with Hawai’i, Guåhan (Guam), the Marshall Islands, and American Sāmoa.

I would place the link between militarization and adverse health effects as a result of a colonial project versus a neo-colonial one. I understand neocolonialism in the way that Kānaka Maoli scholar and activist Haunani-Kay Trak defines the term: “the experience of oppression at a stage that is nominally identified as independent or autonomous... [used] nominally to underscore the reality that independence from the colonial power is legal but not economic.”<sup>123</sup> Considering the territory status of American Sāmoa (and the fact that Eastern Sāmoa is formally recognized as “American Sāmoa”), American Sāmoa, and thus the interplay between militarization and health taking place, are excluded from being a neocolonial project. This would then place it under the category of being a colonial project. To further support this is the fact that American Sāmoa is under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Interior — the same government branch that engages with the Indigenous communities whose land we are settlers on.

Establishing militarization within the context of colonialism helps to highlight how militarization is connected to the current health problems being seen. Beyond militarization existing as an extension of colonialism, “colonial histories [themselves] constitute the conditions of possibility for ongoing forms of militarization.”<sup>124</sup> In other words, histories of colonialism bleed into the present, especially when thinking about their likelihood for creating space for

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<sup>122</sup> Tarcisius Kabutaulaka et al., “Health and Wellbeing” in *Volume 3 of Teaching Oceania Series, Health and Environment in the Pacific*, 48.

<sup>123</sup> Haunani-Kay Trask, “Neocolonialism and Indigenous Structure” in *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai’i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 102.

<sup>124</sup> Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, “Introduction: Militarized Currents, Decolonizing Futures” in *Militarized Currents: Towards a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific*, xv.



militarization to take hold in different avenues. If thinking of militarization as an afterlife form that colonialism can shape into, then the vantage point to connect militarization, food, and health is easier to notice. The militarization of American Sāmoa led to the increased incorporation of imported food products into cultural cuisine and diet (preserved meat, canned fish, sugar, etc.). The high levels of fats, preservatives, and sugar in these products are associated with non-communicable diseases that include diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and more. When factoring existing barriers within American society (food deserts and inaccessible healthcare for example) and epigenetics, these chronic health conditions continue to fester for Sāmoans who live in the United States. Through following that line of logic, it should become apparent how militarization (a colonial project) is implicated in the health detriments plaguing Sāmoans in the United States.

As a clarification, this does not mean that the Sāmoan culture is cursed, and that we are doomed. I personally believe that the incorporation of these imported foods into cuisine demonstrates both ingenuity and agency in reshaping a culture during evolving times. If ingenuity and agency are shown in this instance, then who is to say that it will not shine through in addressing these issues? Additionally, there is community work being done to address these problems, so again, there is hope for a Sāmoan future where we are not heavily plagued by these health detriments. Instead, I want to make it clear that colonialism caused the health crisis Sāmoans are experiencing, with militarization being the form it is both most rooted in when causing said crisis and the most pervasive tool it has in infiltrating Sāmoan livelihood.

## **Recipes and Food Imports**

### *Recipes*

The ingredients listed in this segment are a combination of both those that were indigenous to the island territory and those imported during the naval administration's stint in American Sāmoa. These hybrid dishes (that have been adopted as cultural staples) demonstrate a few things.

Firstly, they show how food can serve as a tether for those in the diaspora to remain connected to the homeland. Everyone I interviewed has lived in the United States since the twenty-first century. Through these dishes, they continue to express one facet of their Sāmoan-ness, or in other words, their use of food keeps them connected to their Sāmoan identity in a tangible way.

Secondly, these hybrid dishes demonstrate cultural continuity. If thinking location wise, these foods serve as a tether to allow for the Sāmoan culture to persist in the diaspora. Thinking about the composition of the dishes, the fact that these dishes still incorporate foods indigenous to American Sāmoa alongside imported foods (instead of being replaced by food imports) showed how the origins of these hybrid dishes are still rooted in American Sāmoa and that, at the end of the day, they remain Sāmoan cuisine.

In connection to the above point, the last point is that these hybrid dishes demonstrate how culture is not stagnant, but flexible and adaptive. In conversations surrounding culture, sometimes the question of "authenticity" gets brought up. The reason for it being in quotation marks is that "authenticity" in that context has been co-opted to weaponize pre-colonial past and history. There is nothing inherently wrong with looking towards the pre-colonial past, however, "authenticity" becomes used as a way to culturally gatekeep while pushing the implication of

Indigeneity belonging to the past. These dishes (which again have been adopted as cultural staples) push against the cultural stagnancy narrative, exemplifying how change and evolution can still render themselves as belonging to the cultural community. These foods implicitly demonstrate how (via their adoption as staples) what is read as belonging to the culture is inextricably determined by the community themselves.

On that note, let us transition to how my family specifically makes certain Sāmoan dishes. While again this is rather personalized and an individual case, these personalized (to my family) recipes serve as a microcosm of how Sāmoan families in the diaspora engage with cultural cuisine. All of the recipes listed below connect to the three points I laid out above: tether connecting those in the diaspora to the homeland, demonstration of cultural continuity, and example of how adaptive culture is. Most importantly, they demonstrate the ingenuity of the person making the cuisine, considering that these recipes are flexible to one's personal taste. In writing about the cooking process, I am going to use the exact words and phrasing given to me, with my own interjections for clarity signaled with “[].”

### Coconut Rice

Ingredients: 5-7 cups of water, 3 cups of rice, Sugar, 1-2 cans of coconut Milk

As my sister Malie explained:

“... so I get the rice and then usually double the amount of water. So like 3 cups of rice [and] 5-7 cups of water [for example]. Just eyeball it. And then 1-2 cans of coconut milk. [You cook the rice with the coconut milk in it.] Once it gets thick, start adding sugar. As much as you want so just keep tasting it and adding it.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Personal Communications, February 16 2023.

### Sapasui

Ingredients: 2 bags of bean thread noodles, 2 (24 oz) cans of pisupo (corned beef), 4 tbsp vegetable oil, 1 large onion (chopped), 2 cups of soy sauce (swan or la choy), 1 small bag of mixed vegetables, 1 tbsp garlic (crush), 1 tbsp ginger (grated), 1 tbsp black pepper, 1 cup of water)

As my auntie Lei explained:

“First, open two bags of noodles into a bowl of warm or hot water and let it sit for ten minutes, before cutting it short, with scissors. Second, heat your oil in a pit on medium heat. Add crushed garlic, chopped onion, black pepper, and ginger. Third, once the garlic and onions start slightly brown[ing], add pisupo (corned beef) and leave it to cook for five minutes. Fourth, add one cup of soy sauce and let it simmer for five minutes. Fifth, add one cup of water and the remaining soy sauce, and mixed vegetables then stir the noodles into the mix. Let it cook for 15 to 20 minutes, or when the noodles are fully cooked. (If needed, add more soy sauce or water to your required consistency).”<sup>126</sup>

### Pisupo and Supakeli (Spaghetti)

Ingredients: Pisupo (canned corned beef), onions (1 whole), oil (enough to cover a frying pan), canned spaghetti, salt and pepper (optional)

As my auntie Sika explained:

“Pour oil to cover the base of the frying pan or pot. Cut and add whole onion (sauté). Add pisupo and fry with onion. Add supakeli and season with salt and pepper (optional).”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Personal Communications, February 16 2023.

<sup>127</sup> Personal Communications, February 17 2023.

### Vai Fala

Ingredients: 1 ripe pineapple, 1 coconut cream/condensed milk, ½ cup of water, ½ of sugar (white or brown), 2 teaspoons of vanilla extract (optional)

As my cousin Laloua explained:

“First you get the pineapple and cut the outside layer off, then cut it in half. Next, grate the two pieces into a bowl. Pour one can of coconut cream or condensed milk and stir till the consistency thickens. Add half a cup of water (optional). Next, add half a cup of sugar and stir. Then refrigerate it for an hour or to the liking of your preference.”<sup>128</sup>

### *Food Imports*

Prior to the influx of imported goods, Sāmoans had a self-subsistence lifestyle. Crop wise, breadfruit, kalo (taro), yams, and coconuts were the staples.<sup>129</sup> When it comes to farming, the growing of breadfruit and kalo alternated; one half of the year they would use the breadfruit trees as a food supply, and when those were not in viable for the other half of the year, they used taro plantations for sustenance.<sup>130</sup> When breadfruit is in season, people would line some of the breadfruit in a pit “lined with banana and cocoa-nut leaves, and covered in with stones,” allowing for it to ferment.<sup>131</sup> After fermenting for some time, it then gets baked. This creates another food option, especially when kalo is scarce.<sup>132</sup> Meat wise, animals such as pigs, turtles, and fowls (chickens, turkeys, etc.) were occasionally eaten, and usually by those of higher rank.<sup>133</sup> Fish and shellfish were more commonly eaten, since “the lagoons and reefs furnish[ed] a large supply” of them.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Personal Communications, February 16 2023.

<sup>129</sup> George Turner, “Food – Cooking – Liquors” in *Sāmoa: A Hundred Years Ago* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), 105.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 107.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>134</sup> George Turner, “Food – Cooking – Liquors” in *Sāmoa: A Hundred Years Ago*, 105.

During the course of the twentieth century, imported foods also made their way into what is considered “Sāmoan” food, most visibly occurring following WWII. In government records detailing the imports and exports in 1950, the five largest imports into American Sāmoa were food, with the largest food type being preserved meat.<sup>135</sup> Preserved meats include spam, vienna sausages, and pisupo (corned beef). The largest categories are preserved meat (978,714), wheat flour (513, 451), sugar (478, 748), canned fish (324, 896), and rice (247,738); the only other imports of similar size are cloth, (unsweetened) milk, lumber, and soap.<sup>136</sup> The quantities of these imports signal that these were consumed in large amounts, indicating the eventual shift that transformed these imports into becoming commonplace in Sāmoan households. It also signals Samoa changing from a self-subsistence lifestyle into a wage labor economy. With an increase in a more sedentary lifestyle, purchasing readily-available food at a market or local shop would come off as more appealing than raising the crops and animals oneself.<sup>137</sup>

The recipes I shared earlier are examples of this shift, with all of these recipes having ingredients that were in the five largest import categories. Both sapaui and pisupo (and) supakeli incorporate pisupo; vai fala and coconut rice include sugar in their ingredient listings, with the latter dish also incorporating rice. Considering that the economy was controlled by the Naval Administration at the time in which these imports were introduced and that the uptick in these imports occurred during WWII, it is easily arguable to place these foods into a legacy of militarization. Yet, even with this militarized baggage, I put forward that these recipes and cultural dishes that came out of this period demonstrate ingenuity. It is possible for both

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<sup>135</sup> “Information on American Sāmoa Transmitted By The United States To The Secretary-General Of The United Nations Pursuant To Article 73 (c) Of The Chapter,” RG284 Records of Government of American Sāmoa, box 5 Record’s of Governor’s Office, series 16 Coded Subject Files 1941-1951, folder 8A Affairs in American Sāmoa 1947-1950 (3 of 3), National Archives, San Bruno, CA: 15.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Tarcisius Kabutaulaka et al., “Food and Health” in *Volume 3 of Teaching Oceania Series, Health and Environment in the Pacific* (Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa, 2019): 54. <http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/46004>.

militarization permeating Sāmoan culture and Sāmoan culture evolving to create a wider range of cultural cuisine (one that includes the imported foods that were introduced) to exist simultaneously with each other, without contradiction.

### **Health Conversations**

So how does the militarization of American Sāmoa and the incorporation of imported foods into cultural cuisine all connect to health? Or rather, why is it important to foreground everything I have noted prior in conversation with discussing health in contemporary times? Nothing in life is completely isolated or exclusive from one another, hence militarization's pervasiveness impedes upon the health of Sāmoans living in the United States.

Regardless of whether people acknowledge the existence of militarized foodways, militarized foodways still influence the way in which we have to navigate the world, health (both the individualized private and collective public variant) included. These militarized foodways embed themselves into our health outcomes. KT and CP both involve themselves in public health adjacent tracks, and their journeys into these spaces reflect and embody this realization.

Both women connect their journey into this space back to their lived experiences growing up, displaying the interconnectedness of life in and of itself. KT described how at a young age she observed how the combination of chronic health illnesses and food insecurities negatively impacted her family, grounding her personal stake in health work.<sup>138</sup> CP shared that leadership and serving in any capacity was ingrained as a family and cultural value at a young age, demonstrating how her current community advocacy work in the United States connects to *fa'aSāmoa* even in the diaspora.<sup>139</sup> Grounded in a desire to uplift their communities, both these observations and lessons from their youth led to them pursuing higher education to continue their

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<sup>138</sup> KT, interview with author, March 08, 2023.

<sup>139</sup> CP, interview with author, March 20, 2023.

formal education in fields that would better help them give back to the community. While their individualized experiences brought forth different health realizations and considerations, both experiences overlap at their continual call back to the collective aspects of health.

A major mobilization factor they shared was the COVID-19 pandemic. They, like many Pasifika community members, noticed how hard our communities were hit during this time, as well as the lack of resources coming our way. From a policy standpoint, they were both involved in the renewed effort to push for data disaggregation, that way our communities are not being overlooked by policymakers. They both were involved in the creation and/or upkeep of the NHPI Data Policy Lab, a resource specifically designed to gather and share health data about our communities for our communities.<sup>140,141</sup> Since data disaggregation makes it hard to address these inequities in our community, this tool attempts to alleviate that burden caused by a systemic gap.

They both were also directly engaged with the communities on the ground, again demonstrating Sāmoan values. They both got involved in and alongside community organizations (such as the NHPI COVID Response Team) that directly addressed community needs, ranging from providing resources such as PPE and food to helping put on and run vaccine clinics.<sup>142,143</sup> Their involvement on both the policy and personal levels demonstrate the importance of intersecting both. To navigate within a community requires that one is invested in the community and actually a member, meaning that it is imperative to show up in these spaces and do the work. To some degree, it does not matter what policies a person advocates for if they are not part of the community, since it calls into question how someone (who is not within or works alongside the community) would know what is best if they are absent from those spaces.

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<sup>140</sup> KT, interview with author, March 08, 2023.

<sup>141</sup> CP, interview with author, March 20, 2023.

<sup>142</sup> KT, interview with author, March 08, 2023.

<sup>143</sup> CP, interview with author, March 20, 2023.



Yet, their work also highlights the importance of elevating and uplifting community needs and concerns to lawmakers, that way the changes the community seeks become institutionalized.

Considering militarization is a process that occurs on the institutional level, how would militarization show up in health disparities? After all, it is not physically a contagious pathogen. However, through a combination of cultural historical trauma (“cumulative effects of colonialism including loss of customary social structures, loss of land, and institutionalized forms of racism and oppression that impact health”) and militarized foodways (the military quality and embodiment seen in the production and consumption of food), militarization negatively impacts health.<sup>144</sup> Chronic health diseases are a clear example of this.

When asked what they considered to be common threads and issues plaguing Samoan communities health wise/when considering public health, the first answer that KT and CP responded with (when thinking of individual physical health) was chronic health diseases, a compilation of health detriments that all three of us have personally witnessed afflicted upon our loved ones.<sup>145</sup> Examples of chronic health disease include (but are not limited to) diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and obesity.

Amongst racial groups, NHPI folks have the highest rates of the likeliness to receive diabetes diagnoses (and cancer diagnoses) of any racial group.<sup>146,147</sup> Strictly focusing on diabetes diagnoses, a higher percentage of NHPI adults (19.8%) have diabetes than Non-Hispanic White (NHW) adults (8%).<sup>148</sup> This is also reflected in diabetes-related death statistics. Reflected across

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<sup>144</sup> Tarcisius Kabutaulaka et al., “Health and Wellbeing” in *Volume 3 of Teaching Oceania Series, Health and Environment in the Pacific*, 48.

<sup>145</sup> Personal Communications, March 8 2023; March 20 2023.

<sup>146</sup> EPIC & AAAJ, *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders In the United States, 2014* [National], (Los Angeles: 2014), 14.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> “Diabetes and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders - The Office of Minority Health,” accessed October 21, 2022, <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?vl=4&vlid=78>.

a general total death rates and when looking at specific sex binaries, NHPI adults have higher diabetes death rates per 100,000 than NHW adults.<sup>149</sup>

The colonial imagination envisions Polynesian peoples as being inherently massive, larger than the average American (in terms of size and weight). While the expansiveness of this stereotype varies from case to case in terms of ethnic groups targeted by this, one aspect that is almost present in any iteration of this stereotype is the heavyweight assumption. From a medical standpoint, the basis of this assumption is sound. NHPI individuals have a higher than average rate of being obese (35% versus the national average of 28%).<sup>150</sup> If looking at specific regions with high NHPI populations, statewide across Hawai'i, NHPI folks have a higher rate than any other racial group of being obese as well as being higher than the average rate (45% v.s. 23%).<sup>151</sup>

The likelihood and risks associated with weight present itself prior to adulthood. In observing high school youth, NHPI students were more likely to be overweight than NHW peers in 2017, with the percentages being 21.5% and 14% respectively.<sup>152</sup> The percentage gap increases in this year if considering obesity rates between these two demographics, with 21.5% shifting to 26.7% for NHPI students and 14% going to 12.5% for NHW students.<sup>153</sup>

In 2014, the Office of Minority Health presented data concerning body mass index (BMI) in relation to being overweight and to being obese. For reference, the BMI indicating being overweight, but not obese, is 25 and over.<sup>154</sup> BMI indicating obesity is 30 and over.<sup>155</sup>

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

<sup>150</sup> EPIC & AAAJ, *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders In the United States, 2014* [National], (Los Angeles: 2014), 14.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>152</sup> "Obesity and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders - The Office of Minority Health," accessed October 21, 2022, <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?vl=4&vlid=85>.

<sup>153</sup> "Obesity and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders - The Office of Minority Health," accessed October 21, 2022, <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?vl=4&vlid=85>.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

If narrowing it down to monoracial adults, the percentage of Sāmoans whose BMI indicates them being overweight, but not obese, is 28.2%.<sup>156</sup> This is lower than the percentage of White adults whose BMI indicates them being overweight, but not obese (35%).<sup>157</sup> However, if looking at the percentage of adults whose BMI indicates obesity, Sāmoans have a percentage (61.5%) than White folks (28.2%).<sup>158</sup> The Office of Minority Health presents data two years later comparing these same statistics. While the overall trends seen in 2014 persists, the percentages shifted in 2016. Looking at percentages of adults whose BMI indicated being overweight in 2016, White folks still have a higher percentage (34.3%) than Sāmoans (22.4%).<sup>159</sup> Similarly, in 2016, the percentage of Sāmoans adults who were obese were higher (51.7%) than White adults (28.7%).<sup>160</sup> While the 2016 trends mirrors 2014, the percentages for Sāmoans in both categories dropped. This indicates an improving health rate over time in terms of being overweight and obesity. Thus, based upon BMI, Sāmoans have higher rates of obesity than White adults, yet the percentage rates for Sāmoans with obesity dropped between 2014 and 2016.

While not bleeding over into stereotypes, another prevalent health detriment in Pasifika communities with severe negative impact is cancer. The Office of Minority presented cancer data ranging from the years 1998 — 2002. Looking at cancer incidence rates per 100,000 men during this time period, NHW men were slightly higher (587) than Sāmoan men (566.7) overall. Breaking this down to specific cancer site locations, NHW men had higher rates of colorectal (65.6) and prostate (170) per 100,000 men than Sāmoan men (43.1 and 144.1 respectively).<sup>161</sup> Yet, when looking at other sites, Sāmoan men held higher incidence rates per 100,000 men than

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> “Cancer and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders - The Office of Minority Health,” accessed October 21, 2022, <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=76>.

NHW men; these cancerous sites included liver and ibd (54.5 to 6.7), lung (111.9 to 1.2), and stomach (53 to 9.9).<sup>162</sup> If looking at available data showing cancer death rates per 100,000 for both men of Sāmoan descent and those of NHW descent, Sāmoan men overall have a higher rate (293) than their NHW peers (241.3).<sup>163</sup> The data available shows the rates per 100,000 men for liver and ibd (32.9 to 6.1), lung (74 to 72.2), and stomach (40.9 to 5.8) cancers specifically, with Sāmoan men having higher rates in each respective category.<sup>164</sup>

Shifting towards looking at cancer incidence rates per 100,000 women during this time frame, different from men, Sāmoan women have higher incidence rates than NHW women, with the numbers being 472 and 448.5 respectively.<sup>165</sup> Looking at specific cancer types, Sāmoan women held higher incidence rates when it came to cervical cancer (18.1) than NHW women (8.1).<sup>166</sup> Yet, for breast, colorectal and lung cancer, NHW women had higher incidence rates (145.2, 47.6, and 59 in regards to each category in the order listed) than Sāmoan women (102.5, 35.6, and 56.9 for each respective category as listed).<sup>167</sup> Yet, when looking at cancer death rates per 100,000, Sāmoan women held higher rates than NHW women (209.3 to 171.1).<sup>168</sup> The only data on specific cancer types for both Sāmoan women and NHW women during this time frame was breast cancer. Unlike the incidence rate comparison, Sāmoan women have a higher death rate (36.2) than NHW women (27.8) when it comes to breast cancer.<sup>169</sup> In conversation with the data presented by the Office of Minority Health, “a 2013 study of cancer incidences between 1990 and 2008 found that there were increasing rates of prostate, uterine, and colon and rectum

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> “Cancer and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders - The Office of Minority Health,” accessed October 21, 2022, <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?vl=4&vlid=76>.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

cancers among Sāmoans.”<sup>170</sup> Not only does this corroborate data presented by the Office of Minority Health, but it shows that there was an increase in years after the time frame displaying an uptick in cancer types, specifically those “frequently associated with obesity.”<sup>171</sup>

Expanding beyond cancer mortality data, broader mortality data illuminates the avenues (i.e. health detriments) in which militarism fatally impacts one’s life. In specific regions, such as the Bay Area, leading causes of death among NHPI include “heart disease (28%), followed by cancer (22%), stroke (7%), and diabetes.”<sup>172</sup> On a national scale, between the years 2005 and 2010, heart disease was the leading cause of death for NHPI folks, with over one-third of NHPI deaths caused by heart disease; the second and third leading causes were cancer and diabetes.<sup>173</sup> The patterns on the national scale are also seen regionally as well. For instance, in Los Angeles during the same time frame, the leading causes of death for NHPI individuals were heart disease, cancer, and stroke; beyond stroke being up diabetes-related deaths in Los Angeles, the percentage differences between these numbers are different than that of the national scale.<sup>174</sup>

In 2010, NHPI had “rates higher than any other racial group” and rates higher than the national average of being diagnosed with heart disease (~20% v.s. 12%) and diagnosed with a stroke (11% v.s. 3%).<sup>175</sup> This trend is seen somewhat when looking at deaths between 2009 and 2011 at Honolulu; the leading cause of death was heart disease at “a rate higher than any other racial group,” with having cancer as the second leading cause of death in Honolulu.<sup>176</sup> So, from

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<sup>170</sup> EPIC & AAAJ, *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders In the United States, 2014* [National], (Los Angeles: 2014), 16.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> EPIC & AAAJ, *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders In the United States, 2014* [California], (Los Angeles: 2014), 30.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>175</sup> EPIC & AAAJ, *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders In the United States, 2014* [National], (Los Angeles: 2014), 14.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

roughly 2005-2011, heart disease was still severely plaguing our communities in comparison to other health ailments.

If focusing on Sāmoans regionally, across California, lung disease became the fastest growing cause of death for Sāmoan Americans.<sup>177</sup> When looking at leading causes of death, in Seattle, it was heart disease for Sāmoan Americans.<sup>178</sup> The third leading cause of death for Sāmoan Americans in Seattle was stroke, which differs from Los Angeles where it was diabetes.<sup>179,180</sup>

It was noted earlier in this chapter that among NHPI between 2005 and 2010 heart disease was the leading cause of death. When looking within the ethnic groups under the NHPI umbrella, Sāmoans specifically have a slightly higher rate of death by heart disease than the NHPI average (36% to 34.4% respectively). This is an especially concerning statistic, considering that during this time frame, the NHPI death rate was already higher than any other racial category.

Generally speaking, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) are neglected in most demographic data, which is translated over to the health sphere. This is despite being heavily impacted by various health determinants broadly speaking. Considering this, the fact that these statistics are still this severe despite systemic undercounting raises alarm.

It is also important to emphasize that most of the comparative data presented during this section is comparing Sāmoans (an ethnic group) to Non-Hispanic Whites — an entire racial category. Not only does this data demonstrate that Sāmoans, as an ethnic group, have rates

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<sup>177</sup> EPIC & AAAJ, *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders In the United States, 2014* [California], (Los Angeles: 2014), 30.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

similar to an entire racial group, in most cases, the rates for Sāmoan Americans were higher than entire racial categories.

Even with this data, it is plausible that the numbers for NHPI, and henceforth Sāmoans living in the United States, are actually higher. First and foremost, there is a general trend of underreporting when it comes to BIPOC communities.<sup>181</sup> Due to this, it can be expected that these numbers are higher than reported.

Additionally, health care access inequity plagues BIPOC communities, NHPI not excluded. Both KT and CP place healthcare inaccessibility as a public health crisis for Pasifika peoples. Nationwide, “NHPI are less likely to have health insurance than Whites,” with the rate of not having insurance being 14%.<sup>182</sup> When folks are not insured or afforded accessible health care, they are less likely to seek medical treatment. For example, in 2012, cost prices deterred about 18% of NHPI from seeking out a doctor — a rate higher than the national average of 16%.<sup>183</sup>

KT and CP connected healthcare inequity to immigration, when considering this predicament a public health crisis. They both note how the multiple existing statuses for Pasifika peoples (citizen, National, undocumented, etc.) complicate navigating the healthcare system.<sup>184,185</sup> CP shared that these public health inequities are not one-off instances, but continue to impact families throughout their lifetime.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Hansi Lo Wang, “The 2020 Census Had Big Undercounts of Black People, Latinos and Native Americans,” *NPR*, March 11, 2022, sec. National, <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/10/1083732104/2020-census-accuracy-undercount-overcount-data-quality>.

<sup>182</sup> EPIC & AAAJ, *A Community of Contrasts: Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders In the United States, 2014* [National], (Los Angeles: 2014), 16.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> CP, interview with author, March 20 2023

<sup>185</sup> KT, interview with author, March 8 2023

<sup>186</sup> CP, interview with author, March 20 2023

Alongside underreporting and healthcare access inequities, there is also the fact that there are Sāmoan communities not represented in these data statistics. Most of these studies focus on cis adults, so youth and genderqueer individuals are not shown in this. Additionally, since there is not an age delineation, it is hard to determine which adult age demographics are being represented as well. This does not mean that the data presented is invalid, but rather its limitations create the plausibility that the numbers are actually higher.

That said, these health statistics demonstrate a concerning health crisis for Sāmoan Americans in the United States. Beyond the fact that we have statistics that rival entire racial categories, sometimes even eclipsing our own racial category, there is also the fact that these health detriments are rarely isolated from each other.

If people struggle with one health condition, it is likely that they have another and/or one health issue is compounding another. For instance, risk factors for diabetes include, but are not limited to: “obesity and overweight, hypertension, high cholesterol, and cigarette smoking.”<sup>187</sup> Obesity in and of itself is a risk factor for many things, including diabetes, heart disease and stroke.<sup>188</sup> In addition to the fact that these are intertwined, these health conditions are not contained to the single individual. These conditions can be passed down onto future generations, or at the very least increase the risk and likelihood of getting these health conditions versus families where these health conditions are not as prevalent.<sup>189</sup> If this was not the case, geneticists would not have a job in the medical profession. Hence, in addition to informing the prevalence of health detriments in Sāmoan communities, the information presented within the health data also

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<sup>187</sup> “Diabetes and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders - The Office of Minority Health,” accessed October 21, 2022, <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omb/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=78>.

<sup>188</sup> “Obesity and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders - The Office of Minority Health,” accessed October 21, 2022, <https://www.minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omb/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=85>.

<sup>189</sup> CDC, “What Is Epigenetics? | CDC,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 15, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/genomics/disease/epigenetics.htm>.



illuminates the health implications when considering how these detriments interact with each other and how they get passed down.

Noted above, health conditions can exacerbate other health detriments and ailments that might be occurring in one's body. This was demonstrated significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which we are still experiencing. Despite not being heavily reported on, NHPI communities were heavily impacted by COVID-19. If looking at case rates per 100,000 people stemming from March 01, 2020 through July 1, 2022, NHPI communities held the highest rates, with the gaps between NHPI and other racial categories being significantly.<sup>190</sup> In a similar vein, when looking at race and ethnic death rates per 100,000 in relation to COVID during that same time frame, NHPI communities held the highest rate.<sup>191</sup> As established earlier, pre existing conditions can exacerbate and compound with other illnesses. With COVID-19, some of the same health conditions plaguing our communities increased risk for serious symptoms of COVID-19, which could lead to a higher chance of death.<sup>192</sup> Even on a more interpersonal level, I do not know if there is a Sāmoan family (or an NHPI one for that matter) that has not been personally impacted by or suffered a loss due to COVID. With that in mind, these health conditions not only cause harm to Sāmoan bodies in their individual manifestations, but also instrumentally increase the health risks even more when viruses like COVID exist.

The concern that Sāmoans have about health cannot be overemphasized here. Via exploring health data provided on NHPI populations and Sāmoan populations specifically, the severity and prevalence of these health detriments are illuminated. However, even with the

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<sup>190</sup> “NHPI COVID-19 Dashboard,” Tableau Software, accessed October 21, 2022, [https://public.tableau.com/views/NHPICovid-19Dashboard/NHPICDPLDashboard?:embed=y&:showVizHome=no&:host\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpublic.tableau.com%2F&:embed\\_code\\_version=3&:tabs=no&:toolbar=no&:animate\\_transition=yes&:display\\_static\\_image=no&:display\\_spinner=no&:display\\_overlay=yes&:display\\_count=yes&:language=en-US&publish=yes&:loadOrderID=0](https://public.tableau.com/views/NHPICovid-19Dashboard/NHPICDPLDashboard?:embed=y&:showVizHome=no&:host_url=https%3A%2F%2Fpublic.tableau.com%2F&:embed_code_version=3&:tabs=no&:toolbar=no&:animate_transition=yes&:display_static_image=no&:display_spinner=no&:display_overlay=yes&:display_count=yes&:language=en-US&publish=yes&:loadOrderID=0).

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> CDC, “What Is Epigenetics? | CDC,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 15, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/genomics/disease/epigenetics.htm>.

statistical data in mind, it is essential to keep in mind the limitations of the reported data. Not only is it subject to undercounting, but it is not concerned with the origin of these health conditions nor connecting it to a larger and systemic issue. Considering Teaiwa's "s/pacific n/oceans," bridging NHPI broadly and Sāmoan specifically in this conversation is relevant. The inclusion of NHPI data is essential due to the fact that "NHPI" serves as an umbrella term, the fact that there are similarities within different Pasifika communities surrounding these health issues, and the lack of data disaggregation as is.

These health disparities are rooted in militarization of American Sāmoa. This is not an assertion made in an academic vacuum, but a statement validated by KT and CP — with both explicitly tying militarization to imported foods mentioned earlier. CP noted how reliance on canned goods and processed foods (which were not native to families) connects back to health issues.<sup>193</sup> As KT explained, militarization is the reason "why we eat turkey tail; that's why we eat pisupo; that's why we eat all these foods that... have transitioned to become staples in our community."<sup>194</sup>

They also link the reliance on these imported foods to questions of food security. Whether the reliance stems from inaccessibility to healthier alternatives due to natural disasters or residing in food deserts, at the end of the day, these imported foods become further ingrained into the culture.<sup>195,196</sup> Additionally, since these foods have become embedded as community staples, even if people have the financial means for less processed alternatives, they might not elect to do so because these foods serve as a tether back to the islands for those in the diaspora.

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<sup>193</sup> CP, interview with author, March 20, 2023.

<sup>194</sup> KT, interview with author, March 08, 2023.

<sup>195</sup> CP, interview with author, March 20, 2023.

<sup>196</sup> KT, interview with author, March 08, 2023.

These foods end up embodying Sāmoan culture and reshape themselves into an avenue in which one can stay connected to the culture.

Hence, militarized foodways encapsulates the history of American Sāmoa's status as a territory and Sāmoan cultural continuity. The inclusion of these foods are historically grounded in the naval administration's stint in American Sāmoa and their role in shifting the economy there into a wage-labor one. The adverse health outcomes connect back to this economic shift, the existence of these foods, and the cultural historical trauma that occurred. Yet, the existence of these hybrid dishes that later became adopted as staples emphasizes agency and resiliency. From the ingenuity in creating the dishes in combination with what Sāmoans already had back on the islands to the continued use of these foods to bridge the gap between homeland and diaspora, these foods remind people of complicated space American Sāmoa and Sāmoans in the U.S. occupy due to militarized foodways and the history behind it.

### *Conclusion*

At the core of chronic, non-communicable health conditions for Sāmoans lies militarized foodways. Militarized foodways capture the connection between militarization and health conditions through consumption of imported goods. Considering that foodways encapsulate the creation and consumption of food, the inclusion of the word was sensible to me. Militarized as a descriptor clicked, since it would directly point to how the production and consumption of food now had a militaristic characteristic to it. The combination of the two encapsulated the initial connection necessary to expand upon and explore other ways in which militarization led to negative health impacts. For that reason, I decided on titling my thesis as such.

This thesis has revealed historical silences and key events in the militarization of American Samoa. For example, in my first chapter, I examined the partition and Deed of Cession. Given the silences, it was hard for me to accept any narrative in full faith. While my argument that coercion had to be involved in both the partition (specifically the ceasing of the civil war) and the Deed of Cession (in which *matais* signed over land to the American government) is more speculative than conclusive, I was able to extract from the dynamic a conversation about consent. The dynamic between the United States and American Sāmoa mirrors an unhealthy interpersonal relationship. The exploitation of good faith that Sāmoans had in the United States, the restrictions placed upon American Sāmoa's autonomy, the gaslighting that led to the partial erosion of the *fa'aSāmoa*, and the creation of the circumstances that festered into a deep dependence on the United States (and specifically its military) are akin to how a toxic partner would isolate their significant other from a support system to make said significant person over-reliant on the toxic person, all while being emotionally and financially abusive. If an unhealthy relationship blurs the line of genuine consent versus coercion, again,

who is to say that the arrangement between the two nations genuinely came out of mutual agreement? Furthering my concern is the fact that not only is there is no documentation of people's thoughts in what led to the Deed of Cession or how it formally came about, but the fact that circumstances for the partition excluded Sāmoan leaders from the table and came about through thinly veiled threats of naval attacks.

This thesis also provided me with an opportunity to speak with other Sāmoan women who are concerned about the health (both public and individual) of our communities. After reflecting upon these interviews, the emotion that comes to mind is bittersweet. On one hand, the interviews affirmed some of the issues I discussed in my earlier chapters. Knowing that these Pasifika women also see these connections and are in spaces that are trying to remedy the damages to our communities is comforting for me. When I suggested that these health conditions stem from militarization of American Sāmoa, they agreed with my statement and shared their thoughts on the matter. In a way, it shows that the issues I am seeing are not in mind, that they are not just some abstract theory, but that this is actually happening.

With that said, this means that, on the other hand, our community is currently suffering the impacts of American militarism and colonialism. It means that the health detriments physically impacting our bodies, the systems in the public sphere that are exacerbating underlying conditions — they are all connected to the United States's colonial and imperial agenda in the South Pacific. The imported foods that transitioned to being a staple are embodiments of a militarized foodway, one specific to us. And living here in the States, racism is even more rampant. When referring to racism, I am applying geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism: "the state sanctioned and/or legal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected

political geographies.”<sup>197</sup> It is unsurprising that a nation (like the United States) entrenched into settler-colonial, imperial, and White supremacist beliefs (so much so that it embeds itself into institutions) perpetuates harm to communities of color, like we are experiencing.

Yet, the most comforting aspect is the resilience and optimism that comes through. There are numerous Pasifika groups (grassroots and national) doing community based work that addresses these health disparities. There are more Samoans going into the public health sphere, thus having closer proximity to those in charge and advocating for our issues to be seen, heard, and adequately addressed. For me, the fact that we are having this conversation gives me hope. Once you can name a problem, it becomes easier to address (for me at least). I grew up seeing all these health disparities. I continue to see how this reality impacts our community. My own health problems come as a result of inheriting these militarized legacies. Confirming that these chronic health conditions are not something we are inherently predisposed to on the basis of being Pacific Islander allows for us to move the conversation forward on how to address the underlying causes and where to go from there.

Throughout all this, I consciously remind myself to keep a desire based research framework in mind. In order to define that, it makes more sense to contextualize it in the space that it came from. Dr. Eve Tuck wrote an open letter titled “Suspending Damage” in regards to research involving Native folks. Within this letter, three key terms come to light: theories of change, damage-centered research, and desire-based research. Theories of change intrinsically ties itself to the outcome and unfolding of a project since it determines what constitutes valid evidence, factors into identifying what counts as a finding, and involves itself in the politics of what is made public and what remains private. Damage-centered research is a more “socially and

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<sup>197</sup> Joanna Brooks, “Working Definitions: Race, Ethnic Studies, and Early American Literature,” *Early American Literature* 41, no. 2 (2006): 313.

historically situated” deficit model too preoccupied with using pain and brokenness to hold those in power accountable.<sup>198</sup> While the intentions are there, damage-centered research operates off of a problematic theory of change — in seeking resources to better the community, it perpetuates a single story of the community being in shambles, constraining the community to being a victim only. This is where Tuck suggests an alternative: desire-based research. Pushing beyond the victim narrative, this research style focuses on the “complexity, contradiction, and self-determination” of Indigenous peoples.<sup>199</sup> It disrupts the binary of reproduction vs resistance by offering an alternative: a hidden transcript compiled of a mixture of experiences, ideas, and ideologies (that can be at odds since it makes no distinction for ones that are subversive versus dominant) that “necessarily complicates our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance.”<sup>200</sup> With that in mind, when I look back to my first chapter, it complicates the circumstances leading to where we are today.

The Sāmoan instigators involved in the skipjack case and the Tui Manu'a's cup, situations that chipped at the foundation of *fa'aSāmoa*, demonstrated agency when upsetting the status quo. They knew their actions challenged cultural norms, yet American military presence enabled them to make these bold moves. While yes, it can be surmised that decisions made by leadership could be read as forced complicity, said complicity does not implicate the leaders as being passive. It is possible that both decisions involving the partition of Sāmoa and the creation of the Deed of Cession were done with the intention of prioritizing the community's livelihood above all else. This reading complicates the situation, since it encapsulates both the end result of colonialism

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<sup>198</sup> Eve Tuck, “Suspending damage: A letter to communities,” in *Harvard Educational Review* 79(3), (Massachusetts: Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2009), 413.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, 416.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 420.

and native survival methods that not only led to that end result, but the same methods that allowed for people to withstand the situation to this day.

My rationalization of wanting to explore the role of food traces back to my desire to reconcile two existences that I contend to be true, yet their connotations contradict one another. The first is that Sāmoan cuisine at times is an embodiment of American militarism. When thinking of imported foods specifically and how they became integrated into cultural cuisine, this process comes off as another way of U.S. militarism being pervasive. The second is that the existence of this cuisine demonstrates creativity and innovation. They took these ingredients and created dishes that would later become beloved staples of what is considered Sāmoan food. The family recipes I shared encapsulate both these existences: yes, these imported foods and their militarized legacies are incorporated in the cuisine, yet their take on these dishes displays and connects to a long line of inventiveness. Desire based research frameworks remove the obligation to make the two existences reconcile with one another by simply allowing them to exist in contention with one another.

KT and CP concluded their respective interviews by sharing with me their hopes and aspirations when thinking of the future for Sāmoans and other Pacific Islanders. I have been contemplating what it would look like for American Sāmoa to no longer be “American.” I am not referring to simply legal independence from the United States; after all, there are other legally independent nations that remain subjugated due to American neocolonialism. In order to prevent Americanization simply shifting from being an outcome of colonialism to neocolonialism, there needs to be economic independence at play. I envision that a future where American Sāmoa is no longer “American” involves demilitarizing Sāmoa alongside the rest of



Oceania. Whether this involves a unification of Sāmoa or other details involving the geopolitical outcomes is hard to answer, as there are many possibilities entailed in demilitarized Oceania.

I am reminded of how “incommensurability” is discussed in Tuck and Yang’s “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor.” Grounded in third world decolonization, abolition, and critical pedagogies, incommensurability stands in opposition to reconciliation. The reason for their opposition stems from what they serve. Reconciliation serves a settler futurity, whereas incommensurability exists for Indigenous futurities.<sup>201</sup> What is comforting about incommensurability is the fact that it acknowledges that decolonization can exist as a framework without being beholden to answer how it will appear, in fact it might not even know how it will manifest. So, while for me, decolonizing American Sāmoa (and thus losing the “American”) involves demilitarizing the nation, that might not be the same for other Sāmoans. Yet, our difference in opinion does not forfeit the validity of our desires for a decolonial Sāmoan future. Coupled with the fact that there is more open dialogue concerning militarization of American Sāmoa and chronic health conditions (both the two connected together and independent of one another), this gives me hope that there will be a day where these decolonial and demilitarized aspirations for the future will become a reality.

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<sup>201</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor” in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1(1), (Toronto: 2012), 35.

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