

The uncontrollable afterlives of ethnography

Lessons from 'salvage colonialism' in the German overseas empire

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ABSTRACT ■ How does the work of ethnographers contribute to policies they did not anticipate, policies they may even abhor? This article explores the ways 19th-century Europeans who would never have considered themselves as policymakers or even policy wonks – writers, artists, missionaries, and ethnographers – influenced colonial 'native policy'. The article focuses on the case of precolonial European representations of Polynesia (Samoa in particular), tracing the effects of these discourses on the foundational process of colonial state formation in German Samoa after 1900. German colonialism in China and Southwest Africa is also discussed. Both the form and the content of ethnographic discourse influenced colonial interventions, even if these effects were dependent on a contingent array of other determinants. The conclusion discusses various ways in which ethnographers can try to see that their writings are not enrolled into political projects to which they might object.

KEY WORDS ■ ethnography, colonial state, imperialism, policymaking, discourse, Samoa, Polynesia, Germany

From travelers' tales . . . colonies were created.

(Said, 1978: 117)

Ethnographic assistants and experts . . . are . . . indispensable for a colonial government . . . they complement one another.

(Krämer, 1909: 266)

Ethnographers are perhaps less accustomed to seeing their work used by policymakers nowadays than during the first half of the 20th century, when Margaret Mead's research on Samoa was seen as relevant to policymaking in the field of adolescent psychology (Mead, 1959). An even more powerful and long-lasting relationship once existed between ethnography and *colonial* policymaking. Theorizing about this connection was dominated for many years by a focus on colonialism's effects on anthropology (Asad, 1973), but Edward Said's *Orientalism* began to shift researchers' attention to causal arrows running in the opposite direction, from ethnography to colonialism. When Said wrote that 'an observation about a tenth-century Arab poet multiplied itself into a *policy*' directed at 'Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia' (1978: 96, my emphasis), the verb 'multiplied' conjured a determinative relationship linking ethnographic discourse to political practices. Although Said was discussing Orientalism rather than professional anthropology, Talal Asad had already emphasized that it was 'necessary to go beyond the boundaries of the discipline', suggesting that both Orientalism and 20th-century social anthropology were part of the same overall endeavor of subordinating non-'western' societies (1973: 103–4).

The influence of precolonial ethnographic discourse on subsequent colonial rule has been discussed by Susanne Zantop (1997) and Elisabeth Povinelli (2002). The common argument in these and other works can be condensed as a thesis of the 'Devil's Handwriting', according to which precolonial ethnographers played a role reminiscent of the *recording devils* in medieval Christian theology – demons who recorded idle words, unprofitable speech, and other sins (Camille, 1989: 356; Jennings, 1977: 10, 16). By the same token, 18th- and 19th-century missionaries, novelists, artists, anthropologists, and travelers recorded the putative sins of Africans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders and prescribed treatments for these cultures following the judgment day of colonial conquest. Indeed, Europeans frequently described precolonial peoples literally as devils (Steinmetz, 2003). This 'Devil's Handwriting Thesis' was only implicit in *Orientalism* but is impossible to overlook if that book is read together with Said's *Question of Palestine*, published the following year (1979).

In this article I will reconstruct this implicit theory of the effects of ethnography on colonial rule; explore one case in which precolonial ethnographic discourse decisively influenced colonialism; and consider the epistemological lessons for practicing ethnographers more generally. Most

of the 'ethnographers' I discuss here were not stereotypically colonialist in the harsh sense of that term, and some of them struck an explicitly anti-colonial stance. Yet certain features of their work made it available for, and resonant with, colonialism and determinative of the core activity of modern colonial rule: the formation of 'native policy', which I will discuss in a moment. Rather than simply a theoretical enterprise, then, this article is a cautionary tale about the potential uses of even the most impractical and 'value-free' social research and of research whose manifest politics are the opposite of the policies it informs.

One reason ethnographic representations were so readily adopted by colonial governments is that until recently almost all 'western' observers were oriented towards discovering a uniform cultural essence among the non-western peoples they were describing. This 'essentialism' was shared by most observers independent of their views on colonialism. Only the very rare European (e.g. Philip, 1969 [1828]) treated precolonial or colonized societies as both internally heterogeneous and genuinely historical (rather than following some uniform evolutionary development).

Ethnographic essentialism resonated powerfully with modern colonial regimes' orientation towards what they understood as their central task: to stabilize indigenous culture. This quest for cultural stabilization was ubiquitous among the colonial states that emerged in the last third of the 19th century because they confronted populations that had already been exposed to Europeans for decades or even centuries. Even the most geographically remote cultures had been unable to remain completely untouched by the legions of European missionaries, adventurers, and merchants that had swarmed the globe since the age of discoveries.¹ By the time the Berlin Africa Conference (1884–5) ratified Bismarck's entry into the colonial game, many of the people who were destined to become German colonial subjects had already gained some familiarity with Europeans, and even with Germans. Precolonial subjects had integrated European objects into their cultural systems (Sahlins, 1993: 16–17) and they were believed to be capable of moving fluidly between cultural codes.

The colonizers were uncomfortable with this shifting of their future subjects between similarity and strangeness, believing that it put them at a strategic disadvantage. As a German specialist on Southwest Africa wrote, 'the Hottentot knows us better than we know him' (Schultze, 1907: 335). Nineteenth-century European descriptions of Asians, Africans, and Pacific Islanders refer incessantly to the putative gap between appearance and reality, to lying, trickery, and mimicry (Steinmetz, 2002). Code-switchers, even if they were fluent in the English language and had adopted English manners, were disqualified as fully English due to the color of their skin. At the same time, the European could not help but recognize the native's fluency in the foreign culture, and this put him ill at ease.

This precolonial condition of ‘mimicry’ (Bhabha, 1994: 85–92) explains why ‘native policy’ was the defining feature of modern colonial governance.² Colonial native policy, as I define it, encompasses all attempts to limit the natives’ uncontrollable cultural oscillation, and to guarantee that they would neither move all the way over to the colonizer’s position nor barricade themselves behind an unbreachable wall of cultural incommensurability. In precolonial contact zones, by contrast, there was no institution comparable to the colonial state that could attempt to lock the colonized into a single location along the continuum running between difference and sameness. But unofficial European observers in the precolony typically shared the colonizers’ desire to control the contact situation and stabilize the Other. This is why they gravitated towards portrayals of non-European cultures as unchanging and internally uniform. And this explains why precolonial ethnographic representations were readily adopted by colonial officials. In order to explore these linkages in more detail I will focus on representations of precolonial Samoans and their relationship to subsequent German colonialism in Samoa (1900–14), and also touch briefly on another German colony, Southwest Africa (1884–1915).

Ethnography and empire

German rule in Samoa seems to provide immediate and striking evidence for the thesis that colonies emerged almost fully formed from the pages of ‘travelers’ tales’. To understand this we first need to reconstruct the creation of the archive of precolonial European representations of Samoa that were inherited by the Germans in 1900.³

The Polynesian variant of the ‘Noble Savagery’ paradigm originated in the 18th century and initially resembled descriptions of Native Americans and some Africans (see Le Vaillant, 1790), but it soon evolved in a unique direction. One of the key distinctions between ‘ignoble’ and ‘noble’ savages in Oceania revolved around the axis of hospitality versus hostility. Noble Savages were correspondingly constructed as more pacific than those in Africa and America. Initial contact in Oceania was often a fraught affair, and the early landings and their impressions had perduring effects. The story of Cook at Hawai’i – greeted as a god on his first landing and killed the second time around (Sahlins, 1981) – is emblematic of the extremes of early Oceanic contact. These were the sorts of variations that ethnographic discourse, like colonial native policy, tended to smooth out.

The vagaries of European exploration in the Pacific in the age of Cook lent a vital intensity to the issue of islanders’ reception of Europeans. European explorers were existentially dependent on access to islands for fresh water and food. Correspondingly, one of the most salient dimensions

of the western discourse on South Sea Islanders was the perceived distinction between what Johann Forster called the 'two great varieties of people in the South Seas', who were also referred to as two races, tribes, and a bit later, as 'Melanesians' and 'Polynesians' (Forster, 1996: 153; see Thomas, 1997). Polynesian island groups were named the 'Friendly Islands' and the 'Society Islands', while a primary characteristic of the supposedly more primitive Melanesians was their allegedly greater preoccupation with warfare and their hostile attitude towards outsiders, including Europeans (Dumont D'Urville, 1832: 11–12). Horatio Hale of the United States Exploring Expedition (1838–42) stressed the association between the concept of Polynesia and peacefulness:

The difference of character in the three Oceanic races is most clearly displayed in the reception which they have given to their earliest civilized visitors. With the black tribes, a strong disposition has generally been evinced to get rid of the strangers as soon as possible. . . . The Polynesian islanders, on the other hand, have always received them with a clamorous welcome and apparent friendship. (Hale, 1986 [1846]: 73)

The first modern European to 'discover' Tahiti was Captain Samuel Wallis, who landed there in 1767. The official narrative of Wallis' visit (written by John Hawkesworth) described Tahiti as 'one of the most healthy as well as delightful spots in the world.' Of special importance for the future elaboration of the European idea of Polynesia was Wallis' portrayal of Tahitian women as 'all handsome, and some of them extremely beautiful.' Moreover, 'chastity [did] not seem to be a virtue.' This was emphasized by passages describing Tahitian women 'stripping themselves naked,' making 'wanton gestures' at the British sailors, and granting them 'personal favours' (Hawkesworth, 1775, Vol. I: 175, 218, 208, 211, 178, 194). Louis-Antoine de Bougainville arrived in Tahiti just 10 months after Wallis. Upon returning to France in 1769, Bougainville immediately published a pamphlet on the island he called 'New Cythera', after the Greek island mythically associated with Aphrodite. The Tahitians were said to be living 'in peace among themselves,' knowing 'neither hatred, quarrels, dissention, nor civil war; they have no offensive or defensive weapons' (Bougainville, 1970 [1769]: 27). Bougainville's rendering of Tahiti as antique or classical became a mainstay of subsequent representations of Polynesia (Smith, 1992, Ch. 9). Tahitian culture was located at the ideal intermediate point that Rousseau preferred both to corrupt civilization and to the animal-like state of nature.

In an essay published the same year, the surgeon-naturalist Philibert Commerson who accompanied Bougainville characterized the Tahitians even more explicitly as Noble Savages. Commerson used the adjective 'noble', and referred at the end of his essay to Rousseau. The Tahitians, he said, were 'men without vices, without prejudice, without needs, without

dissention.’ They were ‘governed by family fathers rather than kings’ – a key point for enthusiasts of Noble Savagery, who did not necessarily oppose political domination, but preferred the softer and more flexible patriarchal forms to monarchy. Commerson also wrote that the Tahitians ‘know no other God than Love,’ and that ‘the good Tahitian enjoys himself unceasingly, either by experiencing his own pleasures directly, or else vicariously, by taking in the spectacle of others’ pleasures.’ Commerson linked sexuality to hospitality, noting that foreigners were also ‘invited to participate in these happy mysteries; it is even considered an obligation of hospitality to invite them.’ Lest his reader equate these sensual pleasures with the corruptions and decadence of civilized countries, Commerson insisted that the Tahitian represented ‘the state of natural man, born essentially good, free from all preconceptions, and following, without suspicion and without remorse, the gentle impulse of an instinct that is always sure because it has not yet

Georg and Johann Forster

Georg Forster was born in Prussia and moved to England in 1766 at the age of 12 with his father, the accomplished naturalist Johann Forster. Father and son were invited to accompany Captain James Cook on his famous second voyage. The earliest account of this voyage was published in English under Georg’s name in 1777. Georg quickly translated his *Voyage* into German, and the book went through many editions. Johann Forster’s *Observations Made During a Voyage round the World* was also written and published first in English (1778) before being translated (by his son) into German. The elder Forster returned to Germany in 1780, moving on to an academic appointment at Halle University, where he lectured on a wide range of scientific topics (Hoare, 1976). Georg returned to Germany in 1778, where he held different academic positions and published widely. A Jacobin, Georg became a delegate of the radical Mainz Republic to France during the Revolution, and he was stranded in Paris at the height of the Terror. He died there in 1783. Georg Forster is known for his writings on literature, politics, and the natural sciences, but ‘the entirety of his main work rests on the scientific and artistic reworking of experiences during travel and expeditions’ (Schneider, 1998: 684). Both he and his father translated numerous travel narratives into German from English and French, in addition to their own travel narratives, and both men helped to raise the level of Central European interest in Polynesia (G. Forster, 1985c, Vol. 5: 707–50). The naturalist and anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach was inspired by Johann Forster to ‘revive the tradition of training and sending out explorers from Göttingen’ (Hoare, 1976: 310).

degenerated into reason' (1915 [1769]: 462). The intermingling of innocence and voluptuousness constituted the core of the *female* Noble Savage role. Polynesian men, by contrast, 'once were warriors,' but no longer.

The most influential German contributors to the early picture of Polynesia were Georg and Johann Reinhold Forster, both of whom accompanied Captain Cook on his second voyage (1772–5). Georg's published account wove together several familiar registers and tropes, including cultural relativism and 'revindication' (Pratt, 1992), while Johann sometimes emphasized a climatological determinism of culture, but the Noble Savagery code also played a significant role in both of their narratives. Both men referred explicitly to Tahitians as 'noble'.⁴ Like Rousseau, both preferred a social condition located between the 'state of nature' and civilized European corruption. Johann's ideal was for the savage to be 'brought nearer to a more improved, more civilized' state but 'without the addition of these evils, which abuses, luxury and vice have introduced among *our* societies' (Forster, 1996: 199). Georg noted that the Tahitians were not satisfied 'simply to still their pressing needs but also press a step forward culturally in order to enjoy the little comforts of life.' He alluded repeatedly to the moral superiority of Polynesians over British sailors (Forster, 1985a: 51, 2000: 199, 379). Georg also referred to what he saw as the Tahitians' egalitarianism. He understood that it was necessary to recode Polynesian sensuality as *innocence* and to dissociate Polynesian women from the stigma of prostitution (2000: 184–5).

Colonial conquest was not an official aim of these early oceanic voyages and it did not become a realistic goal for Germany for another century or more. Nonetheless, the entire choreography of this era of scientific exploration, in which Europeans stepped onto beaches and planted their national flags, naming and claiming islands, has an undeniable *protocolonial* flavor. But for Georg Forster the European impact was primarily destructive. He recognized (1985b) that voyages like Cook's necessarily disrupted the lives of those who were 'discovered', writing that:

It were indeed sincerely to be wished, that the intercourse which has lately subsisted between Europeans and the natives of the South Sea islands may be broken off in time, before the corruption of manners which unhappily characterizes civilized regions, may reach that innocent race of men, who live here fortunate in their ignorance and simplicity. (Forster, 2000: 168)

Georg Forster might be counted as one of the most explicitly anticolonial European voices since Las Casas, although his anticolonialism was driven by the desire to preserve rather than to transform indigenous life (Todorov, 1984).

Yet in spite of these comments about the 'fatal impact' of European contact, the Forsters' writings were used by advocates of 'soft' colonial adventures. The year Georg's *Voyage Round the World* was published

(1777), a group of German writers associated with the Pietistic *Empfindsamkeit* (Sentimentality) movement came up with a utopian plan for emigration to Tahiti. The end product of this colonization, they claimed, would be a population of mixed-race descendents combining ‘the insights of cultivated humanity’ with the Tahitians’ ‘innocence and goodness of the heart.’⁵ Thirty years later a secret society was formed among some Tübingen University students with the goal of emigrating to Polynesia and creating a colony without money where they anticipated that freedom would be ‘guaranteed to us for centuries.’ These Swabians had been inspired by reading Georg Forster (Volk, 1934: 61). Their ‘conspiracy’ was broken up by the police.

The modern European penetration of Polynesia began in earnest with the voyage of a group of missionaries from the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1796. The LMS moved into Polynesia in steadily increasing numbers in the following decades, converting large numbers of Tahitians, Hawai’ians, and starting in 1830, Samoans. Soon the European powers began assuming formal colonial control over the Pacific islands. Britain declared sovereignty over New Zealand in 1840 and Fiji in 1874; France

Tahiti and Samoa in the 19th century: missionaries, settlers, and colonizers

Tahiti was visited by the British Navy Captain Wallis in 1767; by the French scientific explorer de Bougainville in 1768; by Captain James Cook in 1769 and on his two subsequent voyages; and in 1787 by Admiral William Bligh of the mutinous ‘Bounty’. European settlement and missionary activity began with the landing of missionaries from the Protestant LMS in 1797, which supported the efforts of the local Pomare family to gain control of Tahiti. They converted King Pomare II (1803–24) to Christianity and attacked traditional institutions like the *arioi*, a quasi-secret society with ritual functions. Other customs and traditional authority structures dissolved under the impact of European visitors, settlers, and commodities. The initial result was a Tahitian ‘missionary theocracy’ (Laux, 2000) based on a biblical legal code. During the reign of Pomare III (1824–7) and Queen Pomare IV (1827–77), Tahitian society was weakened by disease, prostitution, alcohol, and the burgeoning settler society. The missionaries’ influence was weakened, and Queen Pomare deported two French missionary priests in 1836. This led France to dispatch a warship in 1842, and to subject Tahiti to informal French influence for the next four decades. In 1880 it became a formal French colony.

Like precontact Tahiti, Samoa was divided into districts and rooted in villages governed by councils of chiefs (*matai*), who were divided between

traditional lords (*ali'i*) and orators (*tulāfale*). Power at the national level was concentrated in a limited number of titles; a legitimate Samoan King or Paramount Chief (*O le Tupu*, literally 'highest in the land') could exist only when the four sacrosanct titles were bestowed upon a single paramount chief, who became *Tafa'ifā* ('holder of four'). Struggles over these titles plunged Samoa into civil warfare repeatedly throughout the 19th century, and contending factions backing the leading royal titles allied with different foreign powers. The first sustained description of Samoans was by the French explorer Lapérouse, who set off from France in 1785 and disappeared in 1788 near the Solomon Islands. Twelve of Lapérouse's men were massacred when they landed at Samoa in 1787. In 1830, John Williams of the LMS arrived in Samoa with a group of indigenous Polynesian missionaries; six years later a group of English missionaries landed. Following the conversion of Malietoa Vainu'upo, *Tafa'ifa* since 1829, the LMS was able to convert large numbers of Samoans. Catholic and Wesleyan missionaries also became active in Samoa somewhat later.

A foreign beach settlement emerged around the harbor at Apia by the middle of the century. The Hamburg based Godeffroy firm arrived in 1857 and created a plantation economy. Samoa experienced a Euro-American 'land rush' in 1870–2. By 1880 the Godeffroy company, now reorganized as the German Trade and Plantation Society for the South Sea Islands in Hamburg or DHPG, controlled 90 percent of the 5000 acres under cultivation in Samoa. When an international commission was constituted in the 1890s to settle disputes over land ownership, Germans came away with a huge majority of confirmed claims. A three-power conference on the fate of Samoa in 1889 determined that the islands would be governed by three foreign Consuls together with a 'Chief Justice' and the Samoans themselves. A European or US 'President' of Apia was appointed by the city council of this quasi-colonial enclave. The foreign powers pushed for a centralized Samoan government in the middle decades but reversed course at the end of the century. In 1899, an international commission charged to investigate the most recent outburst of internecine warfare declared the Samoan kingship defunct. In the same year the Powers partitioned the islands. The United States took over eastern Samoa; Germany annexed the western islands. The Germans appointed as Governor Wilhelm Solf, who had been Municipal President of Apia since mid-1899. Solf had written a Sanskritist dissertation and later studied law. He had served as a translator at the German Consul in Calcutta and as a judge in German East Africa. Solf headed the government from 1900 to 1911, when he was appointed State Secretary of the German Colonial Office. He was replaced by Erich Schultz-Ewerth, his long-time protégé. German rule came to an end in 1914 when troops from New Zealand occupied Western Samoa. The League of Nations granted New Zealand a mandate over Western Samoa in 1920. Western Samoa regained its independence in 1962.

claimed Tahiti and the Marquesas as protectorates in the 1840s and New Caledonia in 1853. Violence was not eliminated from European–Polynesian relations, but it was increasingly monopolized by Europeans. The ideological association between Polynesians and peacefulness was promoted by missionary-induced social processes of pacification.

These changes led to a metamorphosis in the image of Tahiti. During the early decades of the 19th century Tahiti became the European metropolis of the South Pacific, and the culture that had captivated Bougainville dissolved under the impact of the new, or was actively repressed by missionaries allied with the Tahitian King and Christian convert, Pomare II. The space formerly occupied by Tahiti in the European imagination was opened up for occupation by some other ‘New Cythera’. Hawai’i was a plausible candidate, but the infamous killing of Cook continued to cast a shadow over those islands, and the erosion of tradition there was as rapid and dramatic as in Tahiti (Krämer, 1902). Instead, Samoa displaced Tahiti as the symbol of the Ur-Polynesia in the eyes of many Europeans. Many believed that Samoa had been the original site of Polynesian settlement in the Pacific. Samoans were described as the most culturally conservative of Polynesians, as they often are today.⁶

The LMS attacked precontact ‘pagan’ customs but it also bolstered the Noble Savagery framework in various ways, often unwittingly. Many missionaries were happy that Samoa’s ‘semi-communistic system’ allowed no extreme differences of individual wealth (Phillips, 1890: 10). The missionaries resisted an over-concentration of Samoan power in ways that resonated with the sentiments of democrats like Georg Forster. They insisted that the kingship that arose in Samoa during the 19th century was a recent invention, not a venerable institution (Williams, 1837: 433–91). Most significant was the missionary campaign to pacify Samoan male warrior culture. They were sometimes able to prevent fighting or to make warfare ‘less savage’ by preaching against the taking of heads as war trophies and other ‘diabolic cruelties’ (Murray, 1876: 137–9; Phillips, 1890: 85–6; Wilkes, 1845, Vol. 2: 65). The vision of Samoan men as domesticated and welcoming Noble Savages was thus rendered more plausible by the activities of missionaries who ostensibly opposed that selfsame secular discourse.

Precolonial European depictions of Samoa were by no means univocal. The ethnographic visions of missionaries, traders, and settlers differed from those of travel writers, artists, novelists, ethnographers, and other academics. The latter typically adopted the Noble Savagery framework. One reason for focusing on these latter groups is that German colonial rulers in Samoa after 1899 were mainly attuned to secular intellectual productions and tended to ignore or revile the opinions of merchants and military men. This reflected the social class background of the particular men chosen to govern the colony, Wilhelm Solf and Erich Schultz-Ewerth,

both of whom were university-trained middle-class liberals. By contrast, the first German attempt to take control of Samoa in 1887–8 was headed by Eugen Brandeis, a former Bavarian cavalry officer and employee of the dominant German plantation company in Samoa, the DHPG. The activities of Brandeis' 'regime' revealed that Germans were not averse to the more brutal approach to Samoa that was associated with settlers and traders. The most dramatic difference between Brandeis and the German Governors after 1899 was that he distributed ammunition to backers of the Samoan King, Tamasese, and trained them to fight against the opposing Samoan faction (Kennedy, 1974: 74–5). In other words Samoan men had not in fact been entirely 'domesticated', despite the strivings of the LMS and the fantasies of other Europeans looking for a New Cythera. The Samoans' militancy was demonstrated in the battles of 1888 and throughout the 1890s. Samoan men killed German sailors in December, 1888, for example, and decapitated some of the corpses (Marques, 1889: 139). Yet most middle-class and scientific German observers averted their gaze from these realities that were discrepant from the dominant irenic vision of Samoa. The colonial government after 1900 tried to bring realities into alignment with anthropological fantasies (see below).

The missionaries' vision of Samoa as less barbarous than the rest of Oceania was echoed in the idea of a special *kinship* between Europeans and Samoans. Just as Forster and the artists on Cook's voyages compared Tahiti to classical Greece and Rome, the American artist John La Farge, who lived on the islands in 1890 and 1891, likened Samoans to figures from antiquity (Yarnall, 1998: 83). Robert Louis Stevenson's study of the struggle between Germany, Britain, and the United States for control of Samoa, *A Footnote to History* (1892), opens with a comparison between the Samoans and Stevenson's own Scottish ancestors 'who drove their chariots on wrong side of Roman wall' (1996: 1).

Another focus of the Noble Savagery perspective was relative gender equality, whose presence in Samoa was praised by the missionaries (Cooper, 1880, Vol. 1: 3–4; Phillips, 1890: 15). The institution of the Samoan village virgin (*Taupou*) was interpreted in differing ways, but the missionaries took heart from the fact that at least here premarital sex was strictly prohibited (Schwartz, 1983: 925–6). Native women had never been offered (or offered themselves) aggressively to visitors in Samoa. Captain Wilkes of the United States Exploring Expedition noted that Samoan girls had that which 'is rare in Polynesia, some degree of bashfulness' and that 'marriage is respected, not indiscriminate intercourse' (Wilkes, 1845, Vol. 2: 125).

One of the most striking aspects of European discussions of 'race' in the 19th century is the way in which certain populations changed color as their relative standing within comparative ethnographic discourse shifted. This appears absurd to us nowadays, within the context of racial classification

systems that take skin color as fixed. Thus the Chinese changed from white to yellow over the course of the century (Demel, 1992), and the Southwest African Witbooi Khoikhoi people became lighter-skinned ('yellowskins') during the 1894–1904 period, when they were favored by the colonial government (Steinmetz, forthcoming a, Ch. 3). The Samoans also underwent a process of racial 'lightening' during the 19th century, becoming more like the early image of the Tahitians – who themselves became swarthier as they lost their charm for Europeans. Although Lapérouse (see note 7) had described the Samoans as 'very black' in the 1780s, by the 1860s they were called 'copperish-tawny' (Spiegel, 1868: 1114). Two Germans insisted that the Samoans were 'the lightest skinned Oceanians' (Christmann and Oberländer, 1873, Vol. 2: 213), and a British traveler described them as 'a light brown colour, many of them not being so dark as some Italians or Spaniards' (Cooper, 1880, Vol. 2: 14). Joseph Hübner described Samoans as having 'little color' at all, except perhaps a light olive tint, adding that 'if the Olympian Gods were Greeks, it is hardly likely that they had a lighter complexion' (1886, Vol. 2: 409). The common lore by the end of the 19th century was that the Samoans had 'remained pure, defending themselves against any influx of black blood' – that is, against the disparaged category of 'Melanesians' (Baguet, 1891: 25). The culmination of this bleaching process was a comment by the most powerful figure in 19th-century German anthropology, Adolf Bastian (Professor at Berlin University and founder and curator of the Royal Museum of Ethnology), that the Samoans were 'children of nature' who could be seen as 'cousins' of the 'Caucasian' race (Bastian, 1889: 55). When a branch of the Nazi party was formed among old German and 'half-caste' settlers in Apia in 1934, they 'presented their evidence to Berlin' that Samoans were actually 'Aryans' (Field, 1991: 218).

Augustin Krämer, Robert Louis Stevenson, and the colonial uses of ethnographic discourse

The greatest foreign anthropological authority on Samoa before Margaret Mead was Augustin Krämer (1865–1941). Krämer entered the German Navy in 1889 following his medical studies at the universities of Tübingen and Berlin, and he began his career as a naval doctor in 1893 with a three-year cruise to the Pacific (Harms, 1991: 165). Krämer's first major ethnographic publication, *The Samoa Islands*, is still available in English translation. It is an encyclopedic two-volume compendium of Samoan lineages or 'pedigrees', presented in the form of *fa'alupega* (ceremonial greetings) for each village and district. The book also includes transcriptions of historical stories and traditions; descriptions of Samoan meetings (*fono*),

everyday life practices, historical customs, and geographic names; and photographs of people, places, and practices (dances, production processes, etc.). Krämer had spent a year in Samoa during his 1893–5 cruise, laying ‘the foundation’ for his anthropological studies, and conducted his main Samoan research during a second oceanic voyage that lasted from 1897 to 1899. Krämer carried out further field research in German Micronesia (1906–7, 1909–10) and New Mecklenburg (New Ireland; 1908–9). In 1909 he left the German Navy, and from 1911 to 1914 he directed the Linden Museum for Ethnology in Stuttgart. In 1919 he received a teaching post at Tübingen University, where he remained until retirement in 1933 (Schleip, 1989).

Like almost all ethnological field workers and collectors in this era before the creation of university anthropology departments, Krämer was an autodidact who invented his own methodology as he went along. He spent a year and a half in Samoa during his 1897–9 cruise, and was able to engage in intensive discussions with local informants. By the end of this visit Krämer felt that he understood the Samoan language ‘fairly well’, but he still received assistance from a native speaker for all of his written translations (Krämer, 1994–5, Vol. 1: 1–3). Although Krämer conducted many interviews in his own house in Apia, he also spent longer periods of time in the districts and villages where he lived in Samoans’ homes. Indeed, he believed that ‘seldom has any white made such frequent and thoroughgoing claims on Samoan hospitality.’ Krämer drank kava with his informants and watched their dances and entertainments. He rented a copy of Samoan ceremonial salutations and copied them down, and he exchanged medical care for ethnographic information (1906: 181, 468–9, 1994–5, Vol. 1: 5). He described one Samoan informant, a *tulāfale* (orator) named Sauni, as his ‘best teacher’ and an ‘unshakable friend’ (Krämer, 1906: 513). Sauni was born before 1830 – that is, before the Christian era – and he was ‘generally looked up to by other Samoans as one of the wisest men among them’ (Krämer, 1994–5, Vol. 1: 4). Sauni ‘devoted himself completely to [Krämer’s] studies,’ sitting together with him ‘day and night, indefatigably’ (Krämer, 1906: 513). Clearly this was an example of what Firth called the ‘creative contribution of indigenous people to their ethnography’ (2001: 241). Krämer mastered the technique of bringing Samoans into his personal debt as a means of pumping them for information, but at the same time he became dependent on their services and also seemed to be fond of them (Krämer, 1994–5, Vol. 1: 6).⁷

Krämer’s interpretive stance was consistent with, if irreducible to, the ideological framework of Noble Savagery. He did not hesitate to discuss the disturbingly ‘savage’ sides of Samoan life, such as public defloration rituals or historical evidence for obsolete practices of cannibalism and human sacrifice. But he admitted that he had been ‘ensnared by the magic of Samoa’

(Krämer, 1994–5, Vol. 1: 47, note 87, *Ibid.*, Vol. 2: 185–6, 1923: 2–4). In accord with the dominant depiction of Polynesians since Bougainville, Krämer called the Samoans ‘carefree children of nature’ (1906: 224). He praised Samoa’s ‘communist’ culture of joint familial property in land, calling it a ‘noble custom’ (1906: 165; my emphasis), and referred to the future Samoan Paramount Chief, Mata’afa (discussed below), as a ‘distinguished gentleman’ (1994–5, Vol. 1: 4). In contrast to dominant 19th-century European views of Africans as idle and unproductive, Krämer’s book included extensive treatments of Samoan labor. Fully half of the 43 photographic portraits in *The Samoa Islands* were images of people engaged in ‘productive labor’ such as the construction of houses and boats (Harms, 1991: 171).

Krämer also included photographs of nude Samoan women in various poses – ‘lying down, seen sideways from behind’, ‘half recumbent’, and so on (Figure 1). In light of the fact that Samoan women never appeared fully naked indoors or in broad daylight,⁸ these pictures disrupted the sober empiricist realism that governed the rest of Krämer’s work and seemed to derive from the earlier understandings of Polynesian women as ‘sexually available’ (Harms, 1991: 167). It would be easy to interpret Krämer’s inclusion of photographs as prurient, since they did not correspond to an actual feature of Samoan life. At the same time, these images represented an oblique gesture of protest against the missionaries’ refashioning of Samoan tradition, underscoring Krämer’s goal of reversing the tide of history through a kind of *salvage colonialism* (my term, not his), modeled on the *salvage ethnography* that he helped to pioneer. The latter involved frantically recording memories and traditions from elders before they and their cultures disappeared, and collecting boatloads of physical artifacts that were brought back to Europe and sold to museums. The motive behind these activities was the widespread conviction that ‘native peoples’ were dying out due to the pressures of imported disease, commercial civilization,

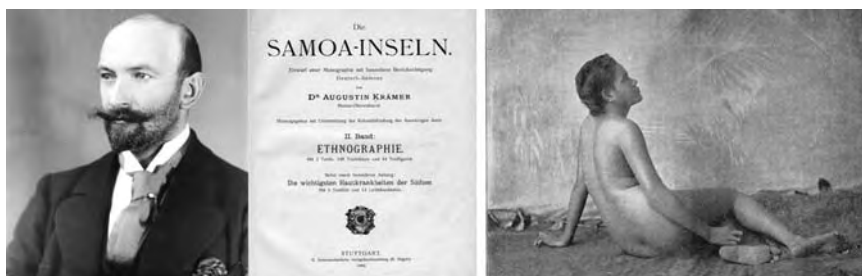


Figure 1 Dr Augustin Krämer, the cover of his first book, and ‘Figure of a Samoan woman lying down, seen sideways from behind’, from Krämer (1994–5 [1902–3]).

and a ‘discouragement or a sort of spleen inspired by . . . the invasion of the homeland that eliminates the desire to bring into the world children who would inherit a profound feeling of decline’ (Quatrefages, 1864: 75).

As Krämer wrote alarmingly in the introduction to *The Samoa Islands* (1994–5, Vol. 1: 2), the ‘spiritual property of those primitive peoples . . . far richer than one is frequently inclined to believe . . . is disappearing before our very eyes!’ He added that ‘no one can predict what can still be salvaged from these islands’ (1903: 362) and fretted that ‘the natural peoples [*Naturvölker*] are going extinct without leaving any historical memorials behind’ (1904a: 22).

Krämer’s resigned acceptance of colonialism in Samoa was based on the argument that only a European-run state could shield indigenous people from these baleful effects. In the introduction to *The Samoa Islands*, Krämer wrote:

I especially hope that the new governments [Germany and the U.S.] will be able to profit from this book. . . . May these studies above all be a stimulus to compile similar material for other islands before it is too late. Now is the best time for Polynesia and Melanesia; for the fruits fall from the tree if the roots are attacked, the moth lays its eggs before it must die . . . Fruit must be picked when it is ripe. Although green fruit often ripens later, once decayed it is irretrievably lost. (Krämer, 1994–5: 7)⁹

A colonial government should protect the ‘roots’ of Samoan culture, and might even be able to rescue the ‘green fruit’ and allow it to ‘ripen’. Like most precolonial ethnography, Krämer’s books contained recommendations for native policy. In his case these recommendations were quite explicit.

Krämer was by no means a rabid colonial enthusiast. This becomes evident in his account of his second Pacific voyage (1897–9). Here he wrote that

there is nothing for Europeans to govern in a new native colony . . . the colored. . . have been governing themselves since ancient times all by themselves, and have usually done quite a good job of it. And when whites start intruding in their government, the native state is destroyed, along with the organic components. (Krämer, 1906: 224)

Krämer did not stop there, however, but went on to imagine a ‘true colonization’ (*eine wahre Kolonisierung*) that would help the colonized rather than simply promoting ‘depopulation’ and cultural destruction as in Hawai’i. His goal was a ‘wise’ colonial government that would work against missionaries and settlers in a ‘mitigating’ way. This was a fairly common attitude during this period in other Pacific colonies, such as British Fiji. But Krämer had extensive experience among Oceanic cultures and believed that a cultural salvage operation was especially feasible in Samoa, given the population’s ‘strong national character’ and stubborn attachment to their customs. The Samoans, he noted, had ‘not yet had the

tastelessness to put on trousers' (1906: 244; my emphasis). In 1914 Krämer suggested that the Germans turn another of their Polynesian colonies, Palau (Belau), 'including its indigenous population', into a Nature Park (*Naturschutzpark*):

The old chiefs will gladly come. . . . and tell stories, with sparkling eyes . . . How seductive it is when the women and girls bring the food offerings . . . clad only in grass skirts. . . . Ban corrugated metal and trousers! (Krämer, 1914: 160–161)

Krämer thought that some form of colonialism was necessary even if one's ultimate aim was to preserve indigenous culture against settlers, merchants, and less benevolent colonizers.¹⁰ As we will see in the next section, German colonial policy after 1899 corresponded quite closely to the vision of Samoa found in Krämer's writing, both in its official self-presentation and in certain aspects of its actual practices, although the colonizers also tried to repress and to selectively refashion some aspects of 'custom'.

Krämer's work had a *direct* as well as an indirect impact on colonial policy. In 1899, while Krämer was still in Samoa, the American Chief Justice consulted with him about 'Samoan customs and their constitution' (1906: 513, 534). Krämer's work was read by both German Governors (Schultze-Werth, 1926: 21). More importantly, Krämer's Samoan writings were emblematic of the dominant academic and liberal approach to Polynesia. His recommendations concerning a mild colonization were reminiscent of the opinions of Georg Forster and Adolph Bastian.¹¹ They also resembled the views of influential official observers of Samoa, including the Samoa specialists in the German Foreign Office who selected Solf for the post of Governor.¹²

This approach to Samoa was by no means restricted to Germans. I have indicated that precolonial French, British, American, and German visitors described the Samoans in similar terms. This was hardly surprising given the cosmopolitanism of overseas frontier settler societies and of the international scientific communities and conferences in which anthropologists discussed their work. The writings of Robert Louis Stevenson demonstrate that non-Germans in precolonial Samoa proposed forms of native policy that were quite similar to those suggested by specialists like Krämer. Stevenson lived in Samoa from 1890 to his death in 1894, and his writing was widely discussed there (see Solf et al., 1983 [1907]: 48–55). His view of Samoans was consistent with the Noble Savagery paradigm. He wrote in 1890 that 'the Samoans are to-day the gayest and the best entertained inhabitants of our planet' (Stevenson, 1998: 33). Such happiness was predicated, he believed, on the preservation of traditional folkways.

Stevenson supported the Samoans' futile struggle to avoid colonial takeover, and he had no official political functions in Samoa. Yet his

writings still provide a sense of the kinds of native policy that were being elaborated in the protocolony, and his everyday relations with Samoans at his estate in Vailima were strikingly similar to the later approach of the German government. Like the German colonial Governors (whose Official Residence was Stevenson's former estate), Stevenson addressed Samoans as children and presented himself as a benevolent but pedantic father.¹³ Two years before mobilizing the Samoans to build a private road to his estate, Stevenson had discussed the Samoan custom of *Malaga* – visiting parties in which people 'go from village to village, junketting and gossiping' and receiving the kava, food, entertainment, and other forms of hospitality required by unwritten rules. He had commented on Samoan 'communism' and the 'conduct prescribed for a Samoan' – 'to give and to continue giving' even until reaching the point of utter destitution (1996 [1892]: 6–7). It was well known that high chiefs were 'entitled to the free work of the people' in building houses, for example (Churchward, 1887: 167). The parsimonious Stevenson used this engrained culture of gift-giving to his own advantage, but he presented himself as having accepted the chiefs' offer of free labor only because he thought the 'lesson' of building the road 'might be more useful to Samoa than a thousand breadfruit trees'.

By 1900, when the Germans took control of Samoa, there was a dense and layered ethnographic archive dominated by the tropes of Noble Savagery and encompassing guidelines for the regulation of Samoan culture. As I will suggest below, officials like Solf and Schultz-Ewerth adopted the views of writers like Krämer and Stevenson for reasons having to do with the sociology of the colonial field of power. First, however, I want to describe the approach to governance in German Samoa and demonstrate its overall correspondence to the dominant precolonial ethnographic approach.

Effects of precolonial ethnography on German colonial policy in Samoa

German colonialism in Samoa after 1900 was oriented above all to freezing Samoan custom in its *contemporary* state rather than preserving some imagined precontact culture. As in other modern colonies the German colonizers' overarching goal was to *stabilize* Samoans around some agreed-upon version of their culture. The difficulty, here as elsewhere, was the perceived biculturalism of the indigenous population. Samoans had familiarized themselves with Germans as a result of the DHPG and its employees, the Brandeis government, and the German Consuls and other officials in the post-1889 tridominium. Most Samoans were Christians by 1900, but their version of Christianity incorporated various 'pagan' elements like the kava ceremony, taboos and tattoos, and beliefs in ghostly spirits (*aitu*).

Europeans considered Samoans to be inveterate liars. Werner von Bülow, a longtime resident in Samoa who was known as an expert in local culture, insisted that Samoans did ‘not have our sense of telling the truth’, and that honesty was even considered to be ‘un-Samoan’ (von Bülow, 1903: 374). The stakes and emotions driving Samoan politics seemed to Germans to be a disturbing mix of the modern and the archaic. In the internal warfare of 1898–9 that provoked the partition of the islands, Samoans had decapitated their enemies and displayed the heads. All of this stimulated the Germans to seek a stabilizing solution.

The native policies introduced by the first German governor, Wilhelm Solf, and perpetuated by his successor, Erich Schultz-Ewerth, appear at first glance to have been oriented towards fixing the Samoans in the admired and idealized condition of Noble Savagery. Solf began his Samoan service in June 1899 as President of the European Municipality of Apia, and he began his term as Governor on 1 March 1900.¹⁴ Solf’s first intervention was to disarm the Samoans by offering to buy their guns. Although this was obviously an effort to stabilize the situation, it is significant that the middle-class colonial Governor of German Southwest Africa, Theodor Leutwein, allowed the Witbooi people to retain their guns after defeating them in 1894 and enlisted them in the colonial army (*Schutztruppe*) – a policy of attempted stabilization through rearmament. The Witboois were also constructed as Noble Savages after 1894 (Steinmetz, forthcoming, a: Ch. 3), but this variant of the discourse emphasized traditional warriors in the style of Cooper’s ‘Last of the Mohicans’. The Samoan version of Noble Savagery required the pacification of autochthonous men.

Solf dealt next with the ceremonial distribution of fine woven mats (*‘ie toga*). Fine mats were used as currency and were distributed on the occasion of marriages, formal apologies (*ifoga*), and when important titles were awarded (Grattan, 1985 [1948]: 15, 168; Mauss, 1967: 6–8). The awarding of the title of *Ali’i Sili*, or Paramount Chief, to Mata’afa in 1900 was one such occasion. Solf decided not to ban the distribution of fine mats but instead to choreograph the ceremony in ways that underscored his own centrality in the process. He first specified the order in which different districts would receive their mats and then reallocated mats after Mata’afa’s initial distribution, allegedly to equalize the number given to each district. This was meant to undercut Mata’afa’s ability to calibrate his gifts according to the importance of the various chiefs and districts. At the same time, by accepting fine mats as an alternative medium of exchange, Solf embraced and reinforced a traditional practice that remains central in contemporary Samoan life.

The Germans’ stated goal was to stabilize Samoan culture around a codified version of local tradition. With several important exceptions,¹⁵ difference was not attacked but rather codified and accentuated. No

preference was given to European legal forms in the adjudication of intra-Samoan conflicts. Rather than repressing the intricate system of honorific titles, the Germans created a 'Land and Titles Office' which regulated acts of inheritance according to Samoan custom. By creating this Court (which is still a core institution in contemporary independent Samoa) the Germans assured that the system of inherited titles would remain central to Samoan life. The Court's main European judge, Schultz-Ewerth, wrote studies of Samoan customary law (e.g. Schultz, 1911). He ruled against a Samoan who was trying to employ the individualistic and 'western' concept of a written will as a substitute for the traditional *mavaega*, a chief's dying wish concerning the inheritance of his title (Meleisea, 1987: 55). By counter-manding the use of the modern testament, Schultz-Ewerth reinforced the traditional Samoan 'sociocentric' concept of the self (Mageo, 1998), as against the more European 'egocentric' notion. Schultz-Ewerth agreed to imprison Samoans who insulted chiefs, admitting that the crime might not be punishable '*faapa-palagi*' (according to the white man's law) but that it was 'extremely insulting' according to Samoan custom. He instructed German officials to treat the Samoan custom of *avaga* – elopement without the consent of the girl's parents – as a form of marriage, but to punish the male abductor for reasons that had no equivalent in German law, for example if the abductor were of such a common family and the girl of such a noble one that their marriage would be an insult to the girl's family.¹⁶ That this was an active effort to govern according to a preferred version of Samoan culture is indicated by the fact that Samoans could only be convicted for engaging in illegal *avaga* by a German official and not by one of the local Samoan district judges.

The colonial Governors often tried to insert themselves into Samoan political practices rather than creating an entire array of new institutions (as in Southwest Africa).¹⁷ Solf styled himself as a Samoan 'chief', proclaiming, for instance: 'I do not come here as the Governor, but . . . as a Chief amongst Chiefs.'¹⁸ When he spoke to Samoans he often held the emblems of the traditional Samoan talking chiefs, the large staff and *fue* (fly whisk). He used Samoan terms or coined Samoan neologisms, framing his communications within Samoan fables and figures of speech. Official meetings with Samoan leaders took the form of the traditional *fono* (meeting), with the German and Samoan parties sitting in their conventional positions opposite one another in the *fale* (Figure 2) – the Germans in the location reserved for important visitors (Krämer, 1994–5, Vol. II: 278). Solf began his meetings with Samoan leaders with the traditional kava-drinking ritual. The only obvious concessions to the Germans that are visible in Figure 2 are the fact that Schultz-Ewerth and another unidentified figure next to him are seated in chairs rather than on the floor¹⁹ and that several Europeans are sitting with legs outstretched, a breach of Samoan etiquette.



Figure 2 Governor Erich Schultz leading a *fono* with Samoans. (Courtesy of the Stadt- u. Universitätsbibliothek Frankfurt, Bildsammlung der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft [City and University Library, Frankfurt-am-Main, Image Collection of the German Colonial Society])

Other colonial interventions shielded Samoan life from the encroachment of the capitalist value form and commodity relations. The Germans prohibited the sale or leasing of Samoan-owned land to foreigners and resisted settler demands that the Samoans should be forced to work on European-owned plantations. Because the Germans could not understand how sacred mats were distinguished from lesser quality mats, or how the value of the latter was determined, Solf created an office to assess the value of fine mats and attach a government stamp to them. By exempting heirloom-quality mats from this process the government prevented Samoans from *mixing* monetary and sacred value systems in ways that did not make sense from a European perspective. In another example of enforced traditionalism, the government tried to coax the Samoans back into practices they were abandoning, urging them to use traditional roofing materials rather than corrugated metal on their houses.²⁰ The use of manufactured materials in housing was one step towards limiting the traditional migratory mobility of Samoans, since western-style homes involved greater investments and sunk costs than a traditional *fale*.

Even some of the more brutal German policies in Samoa were driven by

a desire to freeze indigenous folkways in conformity with an image of savage nobility. Solf is notorious for his adamant opposition to intermarriage between Samoans and *papalagi* (white) settlers, which led eventually to an outright ban. But this rejection of mixed marriage also ‘prohibited Chinese labourers from setting foot in Samoan houses as well as forbidding Samoan women from entering Chinese quarters’ (Shankman, 2001: 129). Given Solf’s disdain for the white settlers in Samoa and his fondness for Samoans, which led him to form an imaginary identification across the cultural boundary with an image of Samoan notables (Steinmetz, 2003), his opposition to mixed marriage might be interpreted as flowing not from animus against Samoans but from a concern to protect them against ‘racial’ corruption. Krämer (1902: 30) also believed that the Samoans had to be defended against the Chinese, whom he described using the ugly tropes of 19th-century Sinophobia: the Chinese were ‘devious, tricky, unclean, and perverse’; they tended to ‘permeate the childish *Naturvölker* like a miasma’ (Krämer, 1902: 30). During the German-Herero war in Southwest Africa Krämer (1904b: 202) suggested that Herero should be deported to Samoa to work on plantations, since they were preferable to the insidious Chinese. It is also remarkable that the Governors of Southwest Africa before 1904 did not agitate against mixed marriage between settlers and the Reheboth Basters, a group with mixed Khoikhoi and settler ancestry.²¹ The difference is that the indigenous half of the ‘half-caste’ equation in this instance had never been highly regarded by Europeans. This meant that the focus in discussions of intermarriage by Khoikhoi was often on their *improvement* rather than degradation (e.g. von François, 1895: 239; Fischer, 1913). Another example of colonial brutality’s compatibility with Noble Savagery was the use of *banishment* as a form of punishment. Solf acknowledged that deportation could constitute ‘a sort of social death in Samoan eyes,’²² but he also recognized that it was an eminently Samoan form of punishment.

None of the German’s efforts to construct the Samoans as Noble Savages contradicted colonial overrule or the ‘rule of difference’ (Chatterjee, 1993) which insisted on an unbridgeable gulf, a fundamental inequality between colonizer and colonized. For example, Solf positioned himself as ‘father’ to the Samoans. This too was understood as a traditional political idiom in patriarchal Samoa, and paternalism gestured towards a level of kinship between the unequal Europeans and Samoans. At the same time the construction of the Governor as father emphasized his superordinate status, as Schultz-Ewerth (1926: 22) acknowledged. Most generally, insisting on the Samoans’ ‘savagery’ was a form of racism, albeit a less egregious and less physically violent version than some others, and it underscored the rule of difference, since a savage people could not be considered as equals. The very ability of the Germans to insist that the most elite Samoans should remain traditional even against their own will reminds us that this was a conquest state.

On the unintentional afterlives of social research

The existence of a strong correlation between dominant precolonial representations of the Samoans and native policy in German Samoa does not tell us *why* this correlation existed. To understand this we have to view the colonial state as a 'field of power' in Bourdieu's (1996, 1999) sense. Bourdieu's theory explains, first, why ethnographic discourse is usually *multivocal*, in contrast to the monolithic image of discourse suggested by Said (1978) and some other applications of colonial discourse theory. *Fields* in the Bourdieuan sense are organized around cultural *differences*. It is difficult to imagine what sorts of cultural material actors could use to carve out hierarchies of cultural distinction if they were faced with a discursive formation that was as flat and uniform as 'Orientalism' – in which, according to Said, there were diverse idioms at the surface but a convergent 'layer of doctrine' underneath (Said, 1978: 203).

Once we locate ethnographic discourse within a social *field* (or battlefield) our attention is drawn to the filiations between particular strands of discourse and social groups. Colonizers' affinities for specific framings of the colonized can be largely explained in terms of the dynamics of *intra-elite class struggle* that were imported into the colonies, even if these dynamics underwent certain transformations. This is one reason why modern colonial empires may actually have varied according to the national identity of their European colonizer, since dominant classes were organized differently in different European countries, even if they worked with precolonial ethnographic discourses that were largely pan-European. The relative strength of the neofederal nobility within the late-19th-century German elite as compared, say, to the French elite at the same time, meant that the struggle within the German and French colonial fields of power was organized differently. But the differences were not due to national character or the greater benevolence of one colonizer as compared to another (Stoler, 2002: 141).

Individual colonizers' preferences for particular framings of the colonized were driven by their competition with one another within the colonial battlefield of power (Steinmetz, 2002, 2004). Each colonizer demanded from all of the others recognition of his or her *ethnographic acuity*. Colonizers gravitated towards ethnographic visions accordingly, finding elective affinities with tropes and narratives drawn from the library of ethnographic representations that they felt would showcase their holdings of cultural capital. This does not mean that dominant actors within the colonial field of power actually had a better grasp of the colonized, any more than Bourdieu (1984) claimed that what counted as good taste in a given field was genuinely superior in some objective sense. But ethnographic discourses were wielded as weapons of distinction. And they underwrote native policies, regardless of their fictiveness or absurdity.

If all German colonizers acknowledged a common currency of prestige, there was less agreement on the *specific* criteria that characterized ethnographic acuity. The overseas German colonial state, like the field of power in metropolitan Germany, was an *unsettled* field, in which various elites struggled to define, in Bourdieu's words, the 'dominant principle of domination' (1996: 376). Power was precariously balanced in the German *Kaiserreich* between three elite classes, or class factions: the modern economic bourgeoisie, the titled nobility, and the middle-class intelligentsia or *Bildungsbürgertum*. Discussions of so-called 'German exceptionalism' have tried to determine which of these groups was *generally* dominant within the Imperial German state (Steinmetz, 1997). In fact, *no* particular definition of cultural capital was all-powerful during this period. Urban government in Germany tended to be dominated by the liberal bourgeoisie and its values; the aristocracy remained well-entrenched in the Army and the Diplomatic Corps; and middle-class intellectuals probably gained more influence in the colonial administration than in any other part of the German state, even if they did not necessarily control each individual colony. The three-way metropolitan intra-elite class struggle was transported to the colonies, where each colonist gravitated towards a vision of the colonized that underscored his socially constructed strengths. University-educated middle-class officials typically emphasized interpretations of the colonized that relied on *hermeneutic* and linguistic skills and that were distant from motives of money and military domination, which they described as less dignified and refined. Aristocrats tended to use military categories in characterizing the colonized, and their preferred native policies foregrounded the nobility's traditional specialization in the arts of coercive command. Settlers and investors usually wanted to turn the colonized into interchangeable versions of *Homo Economicus*, so they were generally *uninterested* in extant indigenous culture, which they evaluated against a narrow range of set categories like idleness and usefulness. We can therefore often understand why one strand of precolonial discourse rather than another guided colonial practice once we know who was put in charge of a given colony. As it happens, middle-class intellectuals ran German Samoa during its entire 14-year existence. Ethnographic preferences were of course not stamped like 'number plates' on the backs of European actors. Many colonizers were located in contradictory class positions, and some were more interested in changing their class status than in capitalizing on their current one. Nonetheless, there were pervasive associations between social class and ethnographic *postures*.

Although we can document explicitly the ways in which German (and other) colonizers read specific precolonial texts, this does not clarify, in and of itself, the precise connection of ethnography to colonial policy. We need to theorize the colonial state field in order to understand how individual

colonizers, in their struggles with one another, deployed available strands of ethnographic discourse from a multivocal formation. Thus even if we know that Solf read Stevenson we still do not know why he adopted Stevenson's views. I have shown elsewhere (Steinmetz, 2002, 2003) that Solf was motivated by a desire to distinguish himself culturally from settlers and Navy captains of aristocratic descent and affiliation, and that he therefore gravitated to the vision of Samoa associated with liberal intellectuals like Georg Forster, Stevenson, and Krämer – men who shared his 'cultivated' approach to indigenous culture. Said was thus basically correct in his general claim about the colonial afterlives of 'travelers' tales', even if he neglected the sociological mediations between Orientalist discourse and policy.

Concluding notes on how to ward off the misuses of ethnography

There are numerous examples of the *conscious* provision of ethnographic research to exploitative and corrupt institutions such as colonial and imperialist states. Augustin Krämer was quite aware of the ways in which his own research might be used by colonial policymakers. The most egregious and best-known example of this in recent US history, perhaps, is Project Camelot (Horowitz, 1967). Similarly, Napoleon Chagnon's description of the Amazonian Yanomamo as an extraordinarily 'fierce people' (Chagnon, 1968) was used by the Brazilian and Venezuelan governments as a justification for 'taking their territories and undermining their authority' (Coronil, 2001: 266). But a 'traveler's tale' can also give rise to colonies without the knowledge of its author and even in spite of the text's manifest anticolonialism.

Nowadays most ethnographers are less sympathetic to colonial and imperialist projects than in the period I have discussed here, and they are often hesitant about political uses of their work. Nonetheless, as Wacquant (2002) has argued in a discussion of recent ethnographies of the US inner-city poor, many ethnographers continue to align themselves with the policy preferences of current rulers – in this case, with the neoliberal, post-Fordist policies of hyper-inequality and the continued dismantling of the welfare state. In light of the steady increase in US imperialist interventions around the globe, from Haiti to the Philippines, it is worth exploring the unexpected political appropriations of even the most apolitical forms of research. There seem to be at least three ways in which ethnographers can ward off the most egregious misuses of their research, all of which are simultaneously hallmarks of good research: historicization, anti-essentialism, and reflexive self-contextualization.

Historicization

Philosophers of science have long argued that ‘general laws’ hold only within naturally or artificially closed systems and that experimental closure is unattainable in the social sciences. This means that social events have to be studied *historically* to uncover their conjunctural determination by shifting congeries of causal mechanisms, and that prediction in a strict sense is next to impossible (Bhaskar, 1979, 1997; Gould, 1989). Although I have focused here on the causal role of precolonial ethnographic discourse, a complete account of native policy would acknowledge that it was shaped by shifting conjunctures of mechanisms in different times and places. Even where colonial policymaking is based on a well-wrought strategy and ethnographic foundation, as it was in German Samoa, it is no more likely than any other kind of policy to have its intended effects. The gap between policy on paper and policy implementation is an old theme in political science and one that has been recognized by colonial researchers as well (Stoler and Cooper, 1997).

Yet ethnographers, like policy researchers, have often acted as if the social world operates according to timeless general laws. Policymakers typically prefer simpler generalizations to conjunctural and historical models of society. By avoiding the positivist lure of causal ‘parsimony’ and repeatable conjunctions of events, and by seeking to describe social life in ways that are adequate to its overdetermined complexity, ethnographers can begin to ward off functionalization by the state. As we have seen in the recent US invasion and occupation of Iraq, the one group of specialists who were not consulted or taken seriously were those who offered a truly historical account of the Middle East in all its postcolonial complexity (e.g. Cole, 2002; Mitchell, 2002).²³

Anti-essentialism

A second way in which ethnographers can prevent misappropriation of their work by policymakers also has to do with better social epistemology. Just as the state generally prefers social research that is packaged as positivist ‘if-then’ statements that can be easily applied (Steinmetz, forthcoming b), state officials gravitate towards monolithic and unchanging portraits of their subjects. This was true even of the more hermeneutically and linguistically oriented officials like Solf and Schultz-Ewerth. The vision of the Samoans as Noble Savages was certainly more nuanced and more affectionate than most of the competing visions, but it was a homogenizing and essentialist stereotype nonetheless. I have argued that modern colonizers confronted a condition of perceived code-switching and ‘mimicry’ which led them to insist on a unitary definition of indigenous culture and to try to

reinforce it via native policy. Cultural anthropology as a discipline emerged in the womb of colonialism – even in the supposedly anticolonial United States, where Mead’s Samoan research was conducted in an American colony and under the protective umbrella of the US Navy. It is therefore hardly surprising that anthropologists were long beguiled by the quest for a unified picture of a culture (Dirks et al., 1994). Like Mead (1973 [1928]), Freeman (1996 [1983]), and most other anthropologists of Samoa in the 20th century, 19th-century ethnographers sought to summarize the basic, universal cultural traits of all Samoans or the cultural rules that all Samoans were said to follow.

Colonial statemakers deployed ethnographic texts regardless of their author’s political or normative stance. Solf and Schultz-Ewerth (Solf et al., 1983 [1907]: 41–55; Schultz-Ewerth, 1926: 21) were influenced by the writings of Robert Louis Stevenson, who opposed colonialism, Augustin Krämer, who supported a benign version of it, and missionaries like John Stair (1983 [1897]), who lived in Samoa from 1838 to 1845 before colonialism was even on the agenda. The most ‘innocent’ descriptions of Samoans sometimes showed up years later as the raw materials from which colonial native policy was forged. But all of these precolonial ‘ethnographers’ engaged in pervasive stereotyping. Perhaps ethnographers can make their work more resistant to imperial use by purging it of homogenizing stereotypes and universalizing models of modernization. Of course this has become a commonplace in recent years, with the rise of post-structuralism and the attack on the concept of culture as uniform and unchanging (Bourdieu, 1977; Ortner, 1999; Steinmetz, 1999). It seems far from coincidental that the anthropological definition of culture as a functional unity flourished during the modern colonial era, and that the attack on this approach began with anticolonial writers like Frantz Fanon. The role of the Algerian anticolonial struggle in the socialization of three otherwise very different critics of structuralism – Derrida (1998), Bourdieu (1977), and the early Althusser (1977) – needs further exploration.

Does this mean that the only strategy ethnographers can use to avoid cooptation or functionalization by objectionable political projects is to fashion indecipherable texts about shifting and ungraspable identities? Malama Meleisea has suggested that ‘Samoans were postmodernists before they became modern’ (1999: 55), since the names and borders of territorial divisions in Samoa were not subject to stable definition but were an important part of the internal competition for power. The discussion of mimicry suggests that anticolonial subjects perceived the advantage of being unreadable long before postmodernity. Alternatively, Foucault suggested that we might prevent practices like the *ars erotica* (‘of China, Japan, India, Rome, and the Arabo-Moslem societies’ [1980: 57]) from being captured by circuits of power-knowledge by remaining silent about them. But these do

not seem to be the only possible strategies for avoiding (or confounding) the 'ear of the prince'. An ethnographic account that is adequate to the internal heterogeneity and tensions within a given culture confounds policymakers as a fundamentally historical account. Even the contemporary, noncolonial state tends to prefer simpler, more unified visions of its subjects.²⁴

Reflexive self-contextualization

Cultural and historical complexity and ontological adequacy are not enough to prevent the misuse of research. It is also necessary for researchers to become aware of the likely relationship between their ethnographic work and its own immediate historical conjuncture. Margaret Mead's depiction of Samoa was problematic not just for its essentialism and ahistoricity (and perhaps its factual errors, as Freeman [1996] argued). Her portrait also had specific implications in the context of United States colonialism – implications that Mead's critics and defenders have both overlooked. Describing American Samoa as a stress-free paradise of childish free love (Mead, 1973 [1928], Ch. II) blended smoothly with the US Navy's paternalistic politics of enforced difference. Rather than criticizing US colonialism, Mead praised it for its 'admirable policy of non-interference in native affairs' (1973 [1928]: 270). Yet US 'preservationism' in Samoa was not non-interference but rather an explicit form of native policy (Go, 2004). One US colonial official acknowledged that the first Governor of American Samoa studied the neighboring German colony in 1905 and found there 'a model which could serve as a basis for planning' (Gray, 1960: 158). Mead's effort to describe the core categories of a monolithic, stable Samoan culture bears an uncanny resemblance to the orientation of modern colonial regimes in their pursuit of cultural stabilization.

Although it is perhaps asking the impossible to recommend thinking oneself out of the dominant theoretical paradigms of the day, researchers can at least familiarize themselves with the political conjunctures into which their research will enter and remain vigilant about the possible resonances of their language and analysis with regnant projects of domination and exploitation. This is not an implausible demand. Various Europeans have criticized and rejected colonialism (Young, 2001: 71–112), from Las Casas to Richard Wilhelm, a missionary and proto-Sinologist in German Qingdao (Jung, 1966; Steinmetz, forthcoming, a: Ch. 7). Just as 19th-century ethnographers could have immersed themselves in critical anticolonial writing if they had so desired, contemporary poverty researchers have every opportunity to read critical analyses of the neoliberal politics that present the inescapable context of their work.

Colonial history can thus offer cautionary tales and guidelines for

contemporary critical ethnographers. The example of the ethnography of the Southwest African Herero demonstrates that *essentializing* representations can have the most destructive effects imaginable. Precolonial European representations of the Herero did not call for their extermination, although their extinction was referred to as a matter of fact. But by describing the Herero as savagely cruel and barely human, ethnographers made that extermination more thinkable. The relentless negativity of this precolonial discourse means that its authors were partly responsible for the German massacre of the Herero in 1904. The Chagnon example shows that the *ahistorical*, scientific quest for 'laws' of social behavior can also legitimate devastating policies. But even the cases of the Forsters and R.L. Stevenson suggest that writers who were quite skeptical about colonialism could be put to use by colonizing projects. Manifest politics are not enough: the form, content, and methodology of ethnographic work must all be considered, along with its relationship to structures of domination. The example of Richard Wilhelm (see Hirsch, 2003) seems to suggest that it was possible, even before the rise of modern European anticolonialism, to engage with foreign cultures dialogically and historically in ways that enhanced both the realism of the work and its resistance to imperial cooptation.

Acknowledgements

I would especially like to thank Julia Hell, Ann Stoler, and Loïc Wacquant for comments on an earlier draft of this article. I am also grateful to Damon Salesa and members of the audience at my lecture at the New School in March, 2004. Peter Hempenstall and Paula Mochida kindly allowed me to read and cite their forthcoming book, and Volker Harms sent me the photograph of Krämer in Figure 2 and gave me permission to reprint it here. Librarians at Michigan and Berlin have been enormously helpful, as have the archivists at the Bundes-archiv in Berlin and Koblenz. Research for this project was supported by the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the University of Michigan, and the German Academic Exchange Service.

Notes

- 1 For the 19th-century Pacific, see Denning (1998) on settlers and Gunson (1978) on missionaries. In my forthcoming book I discuss European and German activities in the contact zones of precolonial Namibia, China/Shandong province, and Polynesia/Samoa.
- 2 I should emphasize that by *modern* colonialism I am referring only to those colonies that were seized in the scramble of the late 19th century, when most of the world came under colonial subjugation, and not to the *early*

- modern* colonies, which often operated according to different logics. I should also note that while Bhabha discusses mimicry mainly in the colonial context, I am locating it decisively in the precolonial ‘contact zone’ (Pratt, 1992).
- 3 Samoa has become famous in recent decades in the context of the debate over the work of Margaret Mead; see Freemann (1996); Holmes (1987); and Tcherkézoff (2001). On 19th-century Samoan history see Meleisea (1987), Gilson (1970), and Hempenstall and Mochida (forthcoming).
 - 4 G. Forster (2000 [1777]): 176, 193, 199, 219, 380; J. Forster (1996 [1778]: 236–7, 244, 346).
 - 5 Letter from Adolf Overbeck to Johann Heinrich Voss, November 17, 1777, quoted in Brunner (1967: 124).
 - 6 As Jocelyn Linnekin (1991) has pointed out, Lapérouse described the Samoans as ignoble rather than noble savages (see Lapérouse, 1799: 160). But while Lapérouse’s disaster at Samoa (see Box 1) led European and American ships to avoid the archipelago for the next three decades, delaying the onset of ‘corrupting’ westernization, his account played only a negligible role in European perceptions of Samoa after 1830.
 - 7 In an otherwise superb book, Andrew Zimmermann describes Krämer as ‘a fairly conventional museum anthropologist’ with ‘little interest in studies of indigenous mental life’ (2001: 235–6). This ignores Krämer’s research in precolonial Samoa, on which his academic reputation was originally based. Krämer (1994–5, Vol. 1: 2) explicitly described his own research as concerned with the ‘*spiritual* property’ of the Samoans, and his work is replete with discussions of prolonged, ‘intimate’ encounters with his informants. Zimmerman also writes that ‘colonists were hesitant to allow anthropologists to involve themselves in questions related to colonial policy’ (2001: 227), but this is contradicted in Krämer’s case, and it also overlooks the fact that producers of ethnographic discourse influenced colonial native policy even when they were not directly consulted or involved. Of course there were often ‘tensions’ between colonial administration and ethnography, as Krämer himself noted (1909), but the relationship was a sustained and reciprocal one nevertheless.
 - 8 Traditionally Samoan girls had danced naked at the end of the *Pōula* (night dance or ‘joking night’), which concluded with the so-called episode of ‘spirit frenzy’ in which girls tore off their clothes and sometimes ‘eloped’ with young men in the audience. Jeanette Mageo (1998: 121, 196) has argued that *Pōula* underwent a structural transformation as a result of missionary pressures, and that its erotic elements moved offstage. What is important in the present context is that Samoan women would not have appeared naked indoors (or even outdoors in broad daylight), even prior to the missionary incursions. Krämer’s nudes were thus unrealistic.
 - 9 Translation altered according to original German from 1902.

- 10 As Krämer became more involved in colonialism it began to frame his work more decisively. Indeed, after his first Samoan monograph it is no longer possible to speak of Krämer as a *precolonial* ethnographer. His 1902–3 book was published with financial assistance from the German Foreign Offices' Colonial Department, and all of his research trips before 1914 took place under the auspices and support of this Colonial Department, the German Navy, or the Prussian Culture Ministry. The Colonial Department instructed colonial officials to support Krämer's research 'by word and deed' (Krämer, 1994–5, Vol. 1: vii, 1906: XII, 1908: 170, 1911: 15, 1917: VII; Schleip, 1989: 126).
- 11 Bastian warned against colonies for Germany in 1873, and in 1884 he rejected colonial projects in China in favor of free trade. He did however mention Samoa as a possible base for the German Navy (Gothsch, 1983: 48, 52, 66–7).
- 12 One former German representative to Samoa within the Foreign Office praised the 'highly attractive traits of this clever Kanaka people' (Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Solf papers, Vol. 18, Schmidt-Dargitz to Solf, 31 May 1899, pp. 115–116). Another of Solf's interlocutors in Berlin, Oskar Stuebel, was a former German Consul at Samoa who had published a foundational study of Samoan culture.
- 13 Stevenson, 1895, Vol. 1: 59, 201; *Ibid.*, Vol. II: 156–7, 1996: 5, 14, 23.
- 14 Documentation for the discussion of colonial policy in the following paragraphs is provided in Steinmetz (2002, 2003, and forthcoming a, Ch. 5); see also Hempenstall and Mochida (forthcoming) and Meleisea (1987).
- 15 Discussed in Meleisea (1987) and Steinmetz (2002, 2003).
- 16 Schultz to *Amtmann*, Dec. 23, 1910, in New Zealand National Archives, Archives of the German Colonial Administration, XVII A 1, Vol. 5, p. 182; Schultz's minute of March 3, 1904, in *Ibid.*, XVII B 5, Vol. 2.
- 17 Of course some new institutions were created, although they were given Samoan names. The *Ali'i Sili* replaced the *Tupu* or King, and this position was itself abolished after Mata'afa's death in 1912 and replaced with two advisers to the Governor. Solf also appointed native district chiefs, district judges, and village officers (Davidson, 1967: 80).
- 18 As reported by the *Samoanische Zeitung*, 28 September 1901.
- 19 Sitting in chairs also allowed the Germans to be physically elevated above the Samoans they were addressing. In the traditional Samoan *fono*, the *tulāfale* stood while presenting their opening orations. As Sahlins notes, the highest Samoan chiefs were 'carried in litters' and 'greeted with elaborate prostration postures' (1958: 37).
- 20 New Zealand National Archives, Archives of the German Colonial Administration, XVII A 1, Vol. 6, p. 145.
- 21 A legal ban on mixed marriages was implemented in the African colony in 1906, see Wildenthal (2001: 94).

- 22 Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Solf papers, Vol. 26, Memorandum of 31 March 1905.
- 23 Hayden White (1987), following Hegel (1956), argued that modern historiography was intimately connected to the state. But this was what Althusser and Balibar (1986: 91–118) diagnosed as an *essentialist* version of historiography and not the complex and overdetermined sort that I have in mind.
- 24 Similarly, the poverty politics of neoliberalism, as Wacquant (2002) argues, summon up research on the poor that relies on moralistic rather than critical or class-analytic categories.

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