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# Challenges to Cultural Heritage Interpretation and Preservation at the Falemata'aga, the Museum of Samoa

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Challenges to Cultural Heritage Interpretation  
and Preservation at the *Falemata'aga*, the  
Museum of Samoa

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to ascertain and analyze the challenges the Museum of Samoa faces in its efforts to preserve and interpret aspects of Samoan history and culture. The Museum strives to interpret and preserve Samoan culture. Samoan culture is still practiced today, but is impacted by globalization, climate change, and loss of skills such as oratory and knowledge of genealogies. Participant-observation was conducted at the Museum of Samoa, as were interviews with relevant personnel. The challenges the Museum faces stem from Samoa's status as a developing nation: education, healthcare, and infrastructure receive priority funding. Many people question the need for an institution for the preservation and interpretation of Samoan culture. However, the Museum has the potential to become a more relevant space for the continuity, discussions, and teaching of Samoa's tangible and intangible culture.

Key words: Cultural Anthropology, Anthropology, Public Administration, Museum

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*Fa'afetai mo le fesoasoani, fa'afetai mo le alofa, fa'afetai le fa'aloalo.*

(Thanks for the help, thanks for the love, thanks for the respect.)

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## INTRODUCTION

The Museum of Samoa, referred to in Samoan as the *Falemata'aga*, is presently located in Malifa, Apia, alongside the headquarters of the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC), a primary school, a secondary school, and the Samoa School of Languages. It receives much of its operational funding from MESC and donations from visitors. Material for exhibitions is often donated by individuals or by institutions such as embassies or high commissions, individual scholars and professionals, and artists or craftspeople. The Museum of Samoa, henceforth Museum, is one of many museums in Samoa, but it is the only government-run museum dedicated to Samoan and Pacific culture, both intangible and tangible cultural heritage, and to history.

There are two categories of cultural heritage: tangible and intangible. Tangible cultural heritage can be defined as physical objects of historical significance left over from the past. Intangible cultural heritage can be defined this way:

'[T]he practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills-as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces, associated therewith-that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage,' (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003).

Like other world's cultures, Samoan culture is comprised of both tangible and intangible elements. For example, tangible culture is manifested in *'ie toga* (fine mats), three thousand year old fragments of Lapita pottery, and in the building of *fale*, or traditional Samoan dwellings. Inextricably woven into the customs and practice surrounding aspects of material culture is intangible culture: for

example, the rules encompassing the ceremonial exchange of *'ie toga*, the socio-political hierarchies that play out in the demarcation of space in a *fale*, oral histories of families or great deeds-the list goes on.

Museums are institutions dedicated to the display and interpretations of objects and artifacts of intangible aspects of culture. Museums are known in most of the world as complexes featuring interpretation of displayed objects and that are open to the wider public. They originated in Europe during the mid-to-late nineteenth century and their nascence and rise to prominence coincided with colonial activities in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Pacific islands (Blake, 2006, p. 3; Colonialism in the South Pacific, n.d.; Fiji Museum History, 2013, p. 6). As such, many items of cultural patrimony, particularly tools, ceremonial objects, and human remains, are held in collections of museums in the post-colonial powers' great cities, far away from their creators' cultural frameworks.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, industrialized nations in Europe and North America experienced social upheavals of epic proportions-civil and foreign wars, mass migrations, and dizzying technological innovations that characterize 'constant ruthless changes in [Western societies'] traditions...' (Hau'ofa, 1983, p. 151). In brief, governments began to move valued objects from the societal elite's closely guarded cabinets and study rooms to buildings with full access to the public. These 'cabinets of curiosity' were small, privately held collections that showcased many kinds of objects: objects from near and far, with emphases on either objects from nature or artificially made objects.

The collections were meant to engender a sense of wonder in viewers, and by extension impress the viewers with the collector's taste and knowledge about the objects (Middle Street Cabinet of Curiosities, n.d.).

This movement of objects from private to public spaces was derived from principles of the European Enlightenment, a period in which so-called reason, rationality, and empirically gathered knowledge were vaunted. This paradigm was thought to be universal, to be a framework by which all peoples assessed and understood the world around them (Sahlins, 2000, p. 45). By exhibiting the vessels by which the society's elite gained and perpetuated esoteric knowledge and the manifestations of their power over the world's peoples, museums acted as institutions for social control. In other words, "[Museums ordered] objects for public inspection and ordered the public that inspected," (Bennett, 1994, p. 124). In other words, museums imposed ways of thinking about and understanding the world that engendered social order and awe of the elites' capabilities among the museumgoers.

This order was brought about, and is still brought about in contemporary museums, through the public's acceptance and internalization of the facts and modes of thinking that presentation of objects entails. This process brought the alienation of objects of cultural significance from their cultural contexts. This makes museums such as the Museum of Samoa controversial in the minds of Pacific islanders (Blake, 2008, p. 3). Echoes of the same voices resonated from pages of written word and from informants' accounts: to many, the Museum of Samoa is not a relevant institution for the

preservation and interpretation of Samoan and Pacific cultures (Nord, 2006, p. 21; Bornfalk-Back, 2008, p. 23).

These opinions are rooted in acknowledgements of Samoa's financial situation. Samoa is a small, isolated, developing country that is heavily reliant on remittances and foreign aid (O'Meara, 1990, p. 6; Va'a, Va'a, Fuata'i, Chan Mow, & Amosa, 2012, pp. 97-120). Developing nations' funds are dedicated to education, healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, and disaster preparedness improvement (O'Meara, 1990, p. 6; Va'a, Va'a, Fuata'i, Chan Mow, & Amosa, 2012, pp. 97-120). Thus, institutions dedicated exclusively to cultural heritage management will have less money and fewer human resources at their disposals. Shortages of funds and human resources inhibit the Museum's capacity to acquire objects, upgrade utilities and exhibition spaces, and to engage with the wider Samoan community through programming and exhibitions that would appeal to them.

Museums are often seen as centers for the dissemination of knowledge. They are often crucibles for debates about the relationship of power and knowledge between colonizers and colonized peoples, about centering Western knowledge and frameworks for acquiring and replicating knowledge, and about aesthetics, beauty, and utility. They privilege Western frameworks of knowledge over non-Western modes of knowledge. The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges the Museum of Samoa faces in its efforts to interpret and preserve aspects of Samoan culture. It will consider how the Museum could become a valuable space for the discussion, analysis, and

practice of culture and custom. In order to become this institution, the Museum must be a place where the past can be made relevant to Samoans of all ages and backgrounds. The Museum must be a place where culture is allowed to be flexible and fluid, and be rooted once more in the relationships people have with each other, with their ancestors' knowledge, their pasts, presents, and futures.

The research's guiding question is this: What challenges does the Museum face in its efforts to preserve and interpret Samoan culture? Where do the challenges come from, and how can they be addressed? The justification for this project is based from the lack of literature about the Museum. There is not a lot of information about the Museum that can be disseminated to museumgoers, Samoan people, scholars, museum professionals, and any other interested parties. This study is intended to highlight ways in which collaborative relationships between the Museum, the Government of Samoa, and outside institutions can be sustained in a way that benefits the people, the tangible and intangible culture of Samoa.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used participant-observation, volunteer work at and visits to the Museum and interviews with museum staff. It was hoped that visitors to the Museum of Samoa and the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum could be given surveys to assess their responses to the exhibitions at each museum, but this was not possible.

Personal communications, text sources such as exhibition labels and informational placards, pages on the Museum of Samoa website and other museums' websites, documents produced by MESC, UNESCO, the Pacific Islands Museums Association, or PIMA, were used. Secondary sources included journal articles about cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge in Samoa and other Pacific islands.

Seven interviews were conducted at each informant's workplace. Informants included employees of the Museum of Samoa, Museum of Fiji, and the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum as well as academics specializing in Samoan history and culture, and members of the Samoan art world. This research was conducted in a span of three and a half weeks, which limited the project's breadth of scope and the depth. A limited number of tourists visited during the research period so it was difficult to both obtain responses to the surveys about the Museum's exhibitions and programming, targeted to museum guests. Another constraint faced by the researcher was difficulty in accessing reliable internet resources.

The main challenges to this research, however, were cultural attitudes towards cultural heritage preservation and management. Many Samoans do not view the Museum, and efforts to preserve aspects of their cultural heritage, as meaningful endeavors. Another setback the research faced was the inability to collect visitor surveys.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Although a number of Museum staff members were interviewed getting information and opinions was complicated by cultural attitudes of respect for supervisors and elders. Each person interviewed was given a project information sheet and had opportunity to remain anonymous. Interviewees wishing to participate signed a consent form and were able to see how their comments were presented in this paper. This was only done for interviews, because there were no surveys done.

## **SOCIO-POLITICALLY BASED CHALLENGES**

The fundamental socio-political systems of the *fa'asamoa*, the Samoan way of life shed light on some of the Museum's challenges. Samoan society is stratified by titled and untitled status, differences in *matai*, or chiefly title, ranking, age, and gender. Interpersonal relationships are determined by social roles assigned based on the above characteristics and are also predicated on the maintenance of the *vā*, or the distance between people (Kruse-Vaai, 2014, p. 21).

Samoans tend to be group-oriented, meaning that they view themselves as units of a larger group than simply as an individual. Dynamics of respect and obligation govern people's relationships with elders, people of higher title ranking, and members of their kin group. For instance, non-titled members of a kin group are obligated to share resources with their *matai*, who are in turn

obligated to share with the highest chief, who redistributes the resources to his *'āiga*, or kin group (Meleisea, 1987, p. 9).

There are two types of *matai* titles: *ali'i*, the high chiefs, and *tulāfale*, the orators or talking chiefs. *Ali'i* titles are used to trace an *'āiga's* lineage to 'sacred origins through genealogies which began with *Tagaloa-lagi*, the creator, and are linked to major aristocratic lineages,' (Meleisea, 1987, p. 8). Titles belonging to *tulāfale* were 'utilitarian...in accordance with their role in rendering service to and oratory on behalf of the *ali'i*,' (Meleisea, 1987, p. 8). The council of chiefs, or *fono*, makes decisions about the village's affairs on behalf of all of the *'aiga* (Kruse-Vaai, 2014, p. 27). The *fono* helps to maintain good relations between all of the village's individuals and families. (Kruse-Vaai, 2014, p.27). Chiefs' and governmental officials' decisions are obeyed without question (Meleisea, 2000, p. 80).

Christianity is Samoa's dominant faith and a major part of many Samoans' identities (Meleisea, 1987, pp. 52-70). The first Christian missionaries, who were English and Tongan, came to Samoa in the 1830s. The *matai* saw that the missionaries were backed by a technologically superior people, and believed that accepting the Christian faith would give them another conduit for *mana*, or supernatural power (Meleisea M. , The Making of Modern Samoa, 1987, p. 13). Instead, the religious officials, first the missionaries and then the clergy, supplanted the *matai* as holders of God-given *mana* (Meleisea, 1987, p. 13.). This attribution of God's grace underlies the Samoans' profound respect for spiritual leaders. Many *matai* also serve as spiritual leaders,

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inextricably linking the chiefly system with the Church (Thornton, Kerslake, & Binns, 2010, p.6). The practice and preservation of Samoan cultural heritage is rooted in interpersonal relationships and relationships with individuals' surroundings.

#### UNDERSTANDINGS OF TYPES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Samoans and Westerners have different conceptions of what comprises cultural heritage. Samoans do not rely on the presence of material culture to transmit their histories, legends, and customs. They do so through the use of oral tradition. Oral tradition is a form of intangible cultural heritage. Oral tradition creates and maintains bonds within and between communities. Understandings of cultural heritage, and how to preserve and interpret it, are influenced by the roles oral culture plays in Samoa.

In Samoa, intangible culture in the form of oral culture is more prominent than material culture for a number of reasons. The first is that Samoans did not use a written language before the arrival of European missionaries. The Samoan orthography was created to facilitate literacy teaching so that they could read the Bible. Information of all kinds was translated through oral tradition: genealogies and claims to land, histories and legends, customary procedures, etc. Sociality was characterized by a large degree of flexibility because of the lack of rigidity engendered by the use of written word.

The recording and communication of ideas, of customary laws, genealogies, historical events, and rights and obligations of all kinds

were very flexible and highly politicized. Truth was, and still is to a large extent, negotiable...anything can happen provided that the transmitters have the ability and power to make things happen (Hau'ofa, 1983, p. 157).

Genealogies and claims to land are particularly important to Samoans. They see themselves as parts of larger kin groups that predicate their identities upon claims to titles and land. Continuity and legitimacy are linked to places. Knowledge is power, and oral histories relating to families' origins are considered to belong exclusively to the family. Sharing those oral traditions is thought of as giving outsiders the power to contest the family's claim to land or titles, and thus compromises the family's legitimacy. (Jonsson, 2009, p. 5; Bornfalk-Back, 2008, p. 14). Conflicting accounts of genealogies and by extension, links to chiefly titles, and land tenure are sources of conflict between and within families.

Emphasis on the preservation and interpretation of material culture such as archaeological remains is seen as inimical to other types of teachings and stories conveyed through oral tradition and religious teachings. Marie Jonsson discusses how one participant reacts to archaeological information that seems to conflict with religious teaching.

Further, recent archaeological proof of the origin of the first settlers of Samoa is not at all welcomed by everyone, one respondent questions claimed to be created by God (Jonsson, 2009, p. 5).

This attitude is the root of the reluctance to use material culture such as archaeological sites and artifacts to establish a historical record. source Many elders are not sharing their knowledge of histories and customs with the youth. The knowledge is not transmitted because those who hold the knowledge wish

to retain the power that holding the knowledge gives them. Tui Atua Tupua  
 Tamasese Efi, Samoa's current Head of State, remarks that

In our culture, before the Europeans, we had custodian of knowledge and knowledge is power. So knowledge was an exclusive property of a key bearer...Unfortunately people are still trying to uphold this culture of exclusive custodian knowledge. I say unfortunately because the consequences of that are that often the oldies are taking the knowledge to the graves.' The challenge that Samoa faces today is therefore how to pass over this knowledge to the next generation...How can you feel, how can you understand the nouns and the metaphors if in fact you don't know how these rituals, how these practices, these kind of fractions, these protocols originated...What is the logic of this taboo information if in fact it leads to the death of our culture, the loss of our cultural heritage? (as cited in Nord, 2006, p. 44).

The Western-style educational system, and the frameworks of knowledge it espouses, are perceived as incompatible with Samoans', and other Pacific Islanders', traditional knowledge frameworks (Hereniko, 2000, pp. 82-84). Knowledge frameworks are the principles and means by which knowledge about the world is acquired, how information is perceived, and how the knowledge is disseminated. Whereas Westerners privilege empirically gathered facts, exact dates, and linear timelines, Samoans and other Pacific Islanders privilege the flexibility and creativity afforded to oral cultures and historical timelines.

Hereniko describes the importance of the 'emotional truth' that comprises oral tradition:

By focusing on external reality, historians marginalized emotional truth, which is the essence of literature, oral or written...The more important question therefore is not whether Elvis Presely is dead, but how he dies, where he died, his motivations for taking his life (if indeed it was a suicide), and the impact of his death on his family in the music world.

These are questions that history texts do not answer because their focus is on when and how certain events took place rather than the emotional landscape of the individuals responsible for those events (Hereniko, 2000, p. 85).

Traditional museological practice is predicated on the dissemination of empirically researched facts, what is seen and understood as 'right'. The truth comes from the perspective of the researcher, not from multiple, sometimes conflicting, but still valid, perspectives. As the Museum continues in its efforts to research its collections, the Museum should be able to gather information from many different sources, so that each reality of an item can be shown, and the viewer can listen for what is not said. It is also important to incorporate the displayed and interpreted heritage into a geo-political context that will allow the viewers to understand how time and place influences aspects of tangible and intangible culture.<sup>63</sup> The Museum's institutional organization influences how it preserves and interprets cultural heritage.

### **INSTITUTIONALLY BASED CHALLENGES**

Accounts of the Museum's early history are conflicting. The website does not provide much information concerning the institution's history, except for stating that the Museum occupies a school building that dates back to the era of German colonial administration (Brash, 2012, p. 103). This was not, however, the first building that the collection was housed in. Until 1999, the collection was housed in governmental office buildings (Bornfalk-Back, 2008 p. 22). The Museum was previously administered by the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Culture.

What prompted the move to the complex at Malifa was the realignment of Ministry portfolios and the creation of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture which now administers the Museum. The three people who work for the Museum are MESC employees. Their titles are Principal Museum Officer, Senior Museum Officer, and Museum Officer (Museum of Samoa, n.d.).

The Principal Museum Officer supervises the subordinate Museum Officers, conducts outreach and promotional efforts, and acts as a liaison between the Museum and outside entities, such as foreign governments, non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, foreign museums, and MESC. These Officers update the object catalogues, conduct educational programming, take special visitors on tours, and other tasks.

Important people's visits build a rapport between the Museum's staff and outside institutions. For example, each Japanese ambassador visits at least once during his tenure, and the Japanese government plans on donating over \$5,000,000 USD to help build a new Cultural Center, which will house the Museum and National Archives. (A. Ah-ken, personal communication, 8 October 2015). The Cultural Center project, which has been on the table for over 20 years, will house the Museum of Samoa, the National Orchestra, and the National Archives (UNESCO, 2014, p. 2).

Currently, the Museum has only two full-time staff (Ah-Ken, personal communication, 2015). Museums in other countries rely on the work of many specialized, skilled staff members. Some examples of skilled museum workers include curators, conservators, and registrars or collections managers.

Curators take care of collections-they choose what objects are added to and removed from the collection, research the objects, and interpret the objects and research in exhibitions. Conservators assess the objects' maintenance needs, performing repairs and preventative work. Registrars track where the objects are- accessioning, or the process of adding, and de-accessioning the objects to and from the collection and creating records for them, and conducting loan agreements and negotiations.

Limited human resources and lack of specialization mean that the Museum currently has no curators, conservators, registrars or exhibition managers on staff. Lack of specialized training in curatorial practice, conservation, and museum administration is an additional challenge. Museum employees are entry-level MESC employees with no academic background in cultural heritage, arts management, or museum studies (L.Sciusco, personal communication, 19 October 2015).

Very few training programs are currently available for cultural heritage management and museology, or the study of museum design, administration, and theory, training programs in Samoa (Nord, 2008, p.21). There have been efforts, however, to incorporate courses on Samoan archaeology and cultural heritage into the Centre for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa. (Sciusco, personal communication, 19 October 2015). Employees of the Museum of Samoa rely on outside entities, such as foreign governments and outside museums, to provide training.

The Museum benefits from collaborative work with other institutions, such as the National Library of New Zealand, or the Turnbull Library, and the American Museum of Natural History. The Turnbull lent over ten Samoan photographs for the Museum of Samoa's exhibition about voyaging (The National Library of New Zealand, n.d.), The American Museum of Natural History and the Museum of Samoa collaborated on an online exhibit, educational materials, and series of blog posts about the effects of climate change in New York City and Samoa (The American Museum of Natural History, 2013). The collaborative project had many purposes:

A group of Samoans and New Yorkers...[worked] together to share and learn from their personal and community experiences of climate change. The groups [approached] the issue by focusing on houses and the idea of home. In workshops [they explored] how our houses define us; either succeed or fail in sheltering us; and might adapt in the future. Practical sessions [centered] on the traditional house of Samoa and on volunteer work with those rebuilding after Hurricane Sandy...They [produced] a video for schools, an online exhibition, and other online resources. The project [built] strong cross-cultural exchanges and [strengthened] personal resources for dealing with climate change. (The American Museum of Natural History, 2013)

Working with institutions located outside of Samoa is beneficial for each party involved. Collaborative work with other institutions can allow for other institutions' employees and the Museum of Samoa's employees to interact: they may share ideas, expertise, and knowledge with each other.

The training employees receive cannot be implemented in some cases due to insufficient funding and infrastructure to keep using the equipment and skills acquired. UNESCO, the International Council of Museums or ICOM, the

International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, or ICCROM, and foreign museums and governments provide staff training for collections management and conservation and how to care for collections and facilities during emergencies (ICCROM, n.d.).

Because the Museum is under the auspices of MESC, the Museum employees regard themselves, and are regarded by other Samoans, as public servants, not necessarily as disseminators of knowledge housed in the Museum (L. Sciusco, personal communication, 19 October 2015). The staff does not carry out interpretation of the objects. Those who donate items to the Museum generally provide the interpretations. (L. Sciusco, personal communication, 19 October 2015).

Basic education is one of Samoa's highest funding priorities. External entities and the Samoan government are cooperating extensively to improve the delivery and efficacy of educational services (Afamasaga-Fuata'i, et al., 2012). Improved educational services can stem Samoans' outward migrations in search of better educational opportunities, allowing for some of the most capable students to stay where their skills and intelligence are most needed. However, educational institutions face challenges such as '[lack of] effective centralization, policy coherence, [strength of] regulations', inconsistent skill sets and competence among teachers, and low student performance (Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture Education Sector, 2015).

In addition to facing these challenges directly, students are not encouraged to study fields that are linked to cultural heritage management, as

these fields are seen as impractical (M. Meleisea, personal communication, 9 November 2015). While aspects of Samoan culture and history, such as language, are integrated into school curricula, Meleisea notes that history is not made to be appealing to students. This negligence stems from both the reluctance to challenge families' genealogies and land claims and the lack of resources provided to teachers to make history appealing to students (M. Meleisea, personal communication, 9 November, 2015).

Hereniko states that Pacific islanders' knowledge is embedded in relationships: interpersonal relationships and personal relationships with one's surroundings. These relationships are characterized by dynamism and change. The only constants in natural world and the social worlds are change (Hereniko, 2000, pp. 80,84). When these relationships are severed through the implementation of Western modes of thought and expression, the knowledge is adulterated and people are left with tentative understandings of the world around them.

## MUSEUMS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

Museums and culture centers in the Pacific Islands play multifarious roles. Museums are popular destination for tourists and students alike. Other museums in the South Pacific have implemented successful heritage preservation and community engagement efforts, but face similar challenges to the Museum of Samoa. Comparing some institutions to the Museum of Samoa highlights the regional prevalence of these challenges.

Elia Nakoro, the Deputy Director and head of the Department of Historical Archaeology at the Fiji Museum, noted similar challenges to the ones that were noted in the study of the Museum of Samoa. He comments that there is a lack of qualified Museum staff, and many of the staff must go abroad for adequate training. He emphasizes the importance of good museum administration, with open and effective rapport between administrators and their subordinates. The Fijian government contributes heavily to the Fiji Museum, and has recently become aware of the Museum's importance, both as a tourist attraction and as an educational and cultural facility. The government has given the museum money to build a verandah with a restaurant and space for workshops and performances to occur. Even though the staff wish for greater community outreach efforts, there are no staff in the educational department. Nakoro commented that he takes many people on interpretive tours of the museum. He also notes the museum's facilities pose many challenges to the staff in their preservation efforts. The museum's collection is sourced from the public, and because the objects consist of sensitive materials, conserving the objects can be very difficult. Also, parts of the Fiji Museum lack air conditioning, which greatly endangers the objects housed there (Nakoro, personal communication, 26 October 2015).

The Fiji Museum conducts, and has conducted in the past, community engagement efforts such as traveling exhibitions, educational broadcasts, visits to archaeological sites in communities that requested excavations, educational kits distributed to Fijian schools, artistic performances, lectures, and free

admission days. Community outreach is essential in Fiji because, as in Samoa, many people do not see the Fiji Museum as relevant to their lives and cultural practice (Fiji Museum History, 2013, pp. 75-85). Since the 1970s, the Fiji Museum has attempted to link its collection of tangible culture with Fiji's rich intangible culture. This was done through extensive collection of oral traditions, which comprised genealogies, songs, dances, myths, and stories. At the project's outset, the traditions were exclusively indigenous Fijian in origin, but in later years traditions from Indo-Fijians, Solomon Islanders, and other people were also collected (Fiji Museum History, 2013, pp. 46-51).

Also, the Fiji Museum had an outreach program dedicated to prisoners. In the Pacific islands, a sharp increase in the crime rate has been attributed to "rapid modernization, urbanization, the breakdown of traditional village life and the decline of the traditional role of the family to teach community values" (Blake, 2006, p. 5). The program consisted of classes about traditional Fijian clans, the chiefly system, traditional etiquette, indigenous food and agriculture, among other topics. Unfortunately, although there is recognition of this program's merits, the Fiji museum did not receive any government funding to continue the program (Blake, 2006, pp. 5-7).

Another example of effective community outreach is the fieldworkers' network at the Vanuatu Culture Centre. The Vanuatu Culture Centre, henceforth VCC, sought to restore connections with the communities of Vanuatu, which had previously seen the museum at the VCC as a 'colonial exercise, as 'something for the white man', and of value only to tourists,' (Blake,

2006, p. 7). To combat this problem, and to aid in the preservation of Vanuatu's rich and diverse intangible culture, the VCC hired volunteer field workers from each of Vanuatu's ethno-linguistic groups to record artifacts of intangible culture. The fieldworkers receive audiovisual recording training and help facilitate workshops on various topics related to Vanuatuan culture (Blake, 2006, pp. 7-8). Perhaps the Museum of Samoa can collaborate with other institutions to implement similar projects. Direct community engagement can restore the treasured relationships Samoans have to their tangible and intangible culture.

## COLLECTIONS & EXHIBITIONS

As of 2013, the Museum houses 300 or more items in its permanent collection (UNESCO, 2013, p.2). A permanent collection consists of items the museum has acquired and owns. The process by which a museum adds objects to its collection is called accession. The items can also be lent to other institutions and removed from the collection. According to the Museum's website, each of the items corresponds to one or more of the Museum's exhibition themes: Pacific Island cultures, Samoan prehistory, Samoan culture, and the Environment (Museum of Samoa, n.d.). The main entrance staircase's walls are currently lined with prints of photographs from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

There are many things that can endanger the safety of a museum's objects. A hot, humid climate such as Samoa's poses many threats to objects'

structural integrities: books get moldy, wood degrades more quickly and fibrous materials become infested with various organisms. However, the most insidious threat to objects is people. Many museums in developed countries have measures in place to prevent people from stealing or damaging objects. These measures include proximity alarms, which produce noises to alert people when they get too close to an object, security cameras or other forms of surveillance, and guards who can physically stop people from tampering with objects and provide eyewitness accounts of vandalism or theft.

When objects are removed from displays for whatever reason, they are moved to a storage room adjacent to the main Museum building. The storage room is air-conditioned to ensure the objects' safeties. The objects are housed in their original display cases. The Museum rotates its exhibitions every six months, each new exhibition coinciding with each new fiscal year. The Museum receives nearly all of its funding and materials for exhibitions from foreign museums and governments, as the MESC only contributes money for staff salaries and building maintenance (L. Apelu, personal communication, 5 November 2015). Governmental and nongovernmental agencies that provide aid to Samoa have programs that give resources for cultural development. For example, the United States Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation provides grant money to projects that protect and promote cultural heritage in developing countries (United States Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, 2012, p. 2).

The Museum occupies a two-story building, with a total of four rooms, two on each floor. The rooms on the bottom floor are currently dedicated to the flora and fauna of Samoa and prehistoric pottery. The other room on the bottom floor houses an exhibit about Samoan sennit, which is fiber made from coconut husks, traditionally made tattooing implements, Samoan fale construction, models of canoes, and traditional games. Galumalemana Steven Percival, a Samoan documentarian and bone carver, curated and donated the exhibition with funding from the United States Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation. The rooms on the top floor are presently home to “Entangled Islands: Samoa, New Zealand and the First World War”, which was donated to the by the Auckland War Memorial Museum-Tāmaki Paenga Hira and the New Zealand government. This exhibit showcases the history of New Zealand’s occupation and administration of Samoa from World War I onwards.

This exhibit was curated in New Zealand and is comprised of videos, which are subtitled in either English or Samoan, depending on which language is spoken in the video, documents, photographs, and objects such as a cricket bat, tee shirts, and flags. The exhibition was modified in order to accommodate items from the Museum of Samoa’s collection (Auckland War Memorial Museum, 2015). Each label is written in both Samoan and English, to encourage Samoan and English speakers alike to read about and appreciate aspects for their countries’ histories.

The labels and placards deliver the interpretation that the institution condones. Just as teachers or elders transmit frameworks for acquiring

knowledge and understanding the world, the interpretive texts instruct the reader how to think about what is being exhibited. When there are no labels, or the interpretation is not thorough, the objects are not explained. This means that they are further alienated from their cultural milieus and original purposes.

### **DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Pacific island cultures are widely perceived to be 'living cultures', which means that 'the majority of people live and practice their customs and culture on a daily basis (Blake, 2006, p.3). Museums can be seen as irrelevant to the continuity of these 'living cultures' for many reasons. Many Samoans view the Museum as irrelevant because aspects of Samoan culture have been retained and are still practiced on a daily basis. Relationships of obligation that characterize village life and the *fa'asamoa* are reinforced by the perpetuation of traditional ceremonies, distribution of money and material goods, and through reverence of *matai* spiritual leaders (Nord, 2006, p. 16).

Leasiolagi Professor Malama Meleisea, a Samoan historian and Director of the Centre for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa refutes this opinion, stating that it is incorrect for Samoans to assume that culture is alive simply because it is being practiced, and that the people who are claiming that the culture is alive are generally not teaching their children, or other people, about Samoan histories, culture, and customs. (M. Meleisea, personal communication, 9 November 2015).

The differences in opinions about the Museum, and cultural preservation and management, reflect the diversity of experiences of Samoan culture and customs. The challenges that the Museum faces stem from the realities of Samoa's economic development. Funding for necessities such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure is prioritized over cultural endeavors.

Cultural heritage preservation efforts should acknowledge and attempt to address Samoans' economic needs, the impacts of climate change, and the reality of diverse experiences of Samoan culture and custom. Threats to both tangible and intangible culture include rising sea levels and increased frequency of catastrophic weather events related to climate change, migration, and larger nations' cultural encroachment as a result of globalization.

Westernization in Samoa has resulted in a 'breakdown in communication between generations...highlighting inequalities between classes and different ethnic groups in the community,' (Blake, 2008, p. 1). Western modes of governance and thought and Samoan modes of governance and thought are juxtaposed in opposition to each other, despite the *fa'asamoa's* resiliency and ability to incorporate aspects of foreign culture into itself (Meleisea, 1987, p. xii). While oral traditions and intangible culture are privileged, tangible culture such as archaeological sites and remains are not.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The Museum has neither the allocated funds nor the resources to make itself into an institution that is compatible with Samoan modes of transmitting

knowledge or be a space in which cultural heritage can be learned about, discussed, and analyzed. The Museum's path to institutional relevancy lies in two places. It lies in the allocations of funds for projects that bolster Samoans' relationships to their tangible and intangible culture. Most importantly, the Museum and wider educational system must aid in the effort to educate Samoans and foreigners alike about the importance of preserving and perpetuating tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Lumepa Apelu, the Principal Museum Officer, believes that forming and maintaining relationships with foreign governments and museums is essential for the Museum. "Networking is important," because the Museum benefits from the external entities' expertise and collections. (L. Apelu, personal communication, 5 November 2015). These institutions should give assistance that allows the Museum staff to create an institution that will engage with wider communities in Samoa.

Future study of the other museums located in Samoa is recommended, as is study of the Centre for Samoan studies' cultural heritage courses. Also interesting would be researching other Pacific communities' museums and the challenges they face.

The Museum of Samoa's future lies in its ability to cultivate and benefit from many relationships: with the tangible and intangible culture it is tasked to protect, with the Samoans it celebrates, with foreign governments, museums, and people, and with the Samoan government. However, limited human, monetary, and physical resources delegated to the Museum inhibits it from

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forming these essential relationships and being brought to the forefront of  
Samoa culture and arts.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

*'aiga* – extended family group

*ali'i* – high chief

*alofa* – love, compassion

*fa'asamoa* – the Samoan way of living and understanding the world

*fale* – Samoan open-sided house

*fono* – council of chiefs, the village's governing body

*'ie toga* – finely woven pandanus mats

*matai* – an 'aiga's chief

*Tagaloa-lagi* – the pre-Christian Samoan creator of the universe

*tulāfale* – orator, talking chief

## Appendix II: Interview Instrumen

INSTRUMENT- Ailini Ah Ken. Museum Officer. Wednesday, 7 October, 2015. Museum of Samoa, Malifa, Apia

- 1) When was the Museum of Samoa founded?
- 2) When did you start working?
- 3) Why?
- 4) In your opinion, what role does the Museum play in Samoan culture and society?
- 5) What kinds of educational programs do school groups receive?

INSTRUMENT: Lumepa Apelu. Principal Museum Officer. Monday, November 9<sup>th</sup>. Museum of Samoa, Malifa, Apia

- 1) How did you start working at the Museum?
- 2) What's your typical day like here?
- 3) What challenges does the museum face?
- 4) What kind of support do you get from the government/outside agencies?
- 5) What is the role of the Museum of Samoa/do you think that the museum is a relevant institution for the preservation and interpretation of culture?

INSTRUMENT: Elia Nakoro, Deputy Director of the Fiji Museum, head of Historical Archaeology department. 26 October 2015, Fiji Museum Verandah.

- 1) How did you start working at the Museum?
- 2) What's a typical day like there?
- 3) What challenges does the Fiji Museum face?
- 4) What sort of support do you get from the Government/outside agencies?
- 5) What is the role fo the Fiji Museum, and do you think that the museum is a relevant institution for the preservation and interpretation of Fijian cultures?

Interview with Lori Sciusco was unstructured. CSS office, NUS.

Interview with Dionne Fonoti was unstructured. CSS office, NUS

INSTRUMENT: Informant no. 1. Gallerist. 10 November 2015. Undisclosed location, 10 November 2015

- 1) Does the Museum of Samoa reach out to artists? Are they effective at doing so?

- -  
INSTRUMENT: Leasiolagi Dr. Malama Meleisea, NUS CSS Office, 9 November 2015, 10:00AM

- 1) What are some challenges to cultural heritage (tangible or intangible) preservation and interpretation in Samoa?
- 2) How can these challenges be overcome?
- 3) How can the Museum become a stronger preserver and interpreter of culture?
- 4) Can western-influenced modes of preservation and interpretation be compatible with aspects of Samoan culture (both tangible and intangible)?
- 5) What would you say to someone who says that there's no place for a Museum Of Samoan culture in Samoa?

INSTRUMENT: Nigel- Tour Guide, the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum, Vailima. RLSM Verandah. Thursday, Nov. 12, 2015, about 12:10 PM

- 1) What roles do you think the RLSM plays in interpreting Robert Louis Stevenson's life in Samoa?
- 2) What challenges does this museum face in doing so?
- 3) What do you hope guests get out of this museum?
- 4) What roles do museums play in Samoa?