

South Seas Confidential: The Politics of Interethnic Relationships in Colonial Samoa

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The people of Polynesia have a reputation for sexual permissiveness, and this reputation, sometimes exaggerated and sometimes misunderstood, has contributed to our own fascination with sex. Our images of tropical isles, blue lagoons, and swaying palms in the beautiful South Pacific are intimately linked with ideas about sexual paradise. But how realistic are these images? And how much of island life do they gloss over?

Today the cultures of Polynesia are rapidly being transformed by globalization. Images of the islands are effectively promoted by the tourist industry, the most recent form of globalization to come to the South Pacific. Along with their laptops and sunscreen, tourists also bring fantasies about sexual paradise. Yet people seeking erotic adventures may be in for a rude awakening. Current travel guides to the region warn tourists about the risk of AIDS and other STDs, about becoming involved in relationships that may unintentionally lead to marriage, and about beautiful island transvestites who look so much like women that unwary visitors may find themselves in compromising positions. Furthermore, many Islanders are well aware of misleading Western images about their private lives and actively resent them. So there is a major disparity between image and reality.

Where did these misleading stereotypes come from? Long before contemporary tourists arrived looking for paradise, other global forces were at work, changing Islanders' lives in very personal ways. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the earliest contacts between the West and Polynesia were between European men and island women. After many months at sea, Polynesia must have seemed like paradise to these weary voyagers. Although we may imagine European-Polynesian relationships as brief romantic liaisons between love-starved ship's crews and lusty maidens—a kind of South Seas version of "Temptation Island"—they were not always temporary and fleeting. Marriages, families, and children were also involved. A variety of

European men had relationships with Polynesian women, including beachcombers and castaways, plantation owners and laborers, traders and whaling crews, as well as colonial administrators and foreign soldiers. These relationships had social and political dimensions, along with sexual and romantic ones.

This chapter explores the politics of interethnic unions in Samoa,¹ the most traditional of Polynesian cultures. Samoa has generally been viewed as homogeneous, stable, enduring, and resistant to Western incursions, at least until relatively recently. Yet by the late nineteenth century, colonial Samoa was already an ethnically stratified, multicultural society. Even then Samoans were no longer isolated and living separately from Europeans. A small but significant group of European men, Samoan women, their children, and their descendants had become an interface between the two groups.

Some part-European children and descendants of interethnic unions became plantation owners, traders, businessmen, civil servants, and important political figures. Yet simply having a European father did not automatically make one part of the colonial elite. Many children of interethnic unions were raised as poor, landless "half-castes" who came to be regarded as a major problem by colonial administrators in the twentieth century. They had different rights and resources than Samoans, and fewer rights and resources than Europeans. In the 1930s, one colonial official described this group in the following manner:

Half-castes form the great social problem of the country; their number rapidly increases... they are almost without exception unemployable except in low grades of work. It is apparent that the problem of the half-caste will become increasingly acute, and a class of poor half-castes already in existence and growing in number will develop and exist on the borderline of extreme poverty—a menace to the Samoan and the European.... It would not be fair to the Samoan in whose interests the islands are governed and the preservation of whose race is considered to be our duty, to give the half-caste the same status as the native with regard to

land. On the other hand, the half-caste can never be expected to rise as a class to ordinary European level. The half-caste must be left to sink to his own level in the scale of humanity and become in time a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for the rest of the community. (in Keesing 1934:463)

For colonial authorities, interethnic unions and their descendants became a pressing political issue. These relationships and the children they produced were not part of an inclusive, democratic society in which people were treated equally. Instead, they marked a divided stratified society in which interethnic unions threatened the colonial order.

This chapter focuses on three periods in the history of interethnic unions in colonial Samoa: the missionary period, the period of German and New Zealand colonial rule, and World War II, each with its own distinct pattern of interethnic unions. During the missionary period in the nineteenth century, unions between European men and Samoan women were common and acceptable. But in the early twentieth century, with the arrival of centralized colonial power, interethnic unions were regulated, restricted, and even banned. Then, during World War II, the presence of the American military occupation, involving tens of thousands of servicemen, altered the dynamics of these unions once more, allowing many interethnic relationships. So, within a relatively short span of time, interethnic relationships went from being acceptable to being unacceptable and then becoming acceptable once again. Why were these relationships so complicated? Why were they so important to both Samoans and Europeans? And how did Samoans view Europeans who became their spouses and/or partners?

THE SAMOAN SYSTEM OF COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Our own perceptions of sex and marriage color our perceptions of other cultures. In America, young adults spend several years of their lives living independently before they marry. The average age of first marriages for

American men today is over twenty-seven and for women it is over twenty-five. As a result, there is a long interval of time between leaving home and getting married; the outcome is a "singles culture" in which sex is a matter of individual choice. As young adults establish independent lives, sex and marriage are no longer closely related. Moreover, interethnic or inter-"racial" relationships and marriages are no longer taboo. These recent developments are very different from the way that Americans thought about sex, marriage, and interethnic unions only a few decades ago. They are also very different from the way Samoans viewed sex and marriage when the first Europeans arrived in the eighteenth century.

In traditional Samoa, young men and women lived with their extended families in villages, each family headed by a chief or *matai*. Young people served their chiefs and did not make many independent choices. Sex and marriage, especially for young women, were under the authority of the family and, ideally, marriage partners were not a matter of choice. Yet there was a period in late adolescence when young Samoans could discretely engage in sex. These relationships often led to marriage, and were very much a part of the Samoan system of courtship and marriage.

Samoans had extensive restrictions on potential marriage partners, but when visiting other villages and districts young people were allowed and expected to seek sexual partners as potential spouses. In pre-European Samoa, there was a tradition of marrying outsiders at both the chiefly level and at lower-ranking levels. Prior to European arrival, high-ranking Samoans intermarried others of rank from Tonga and Fiji as a means of forging political alliances, increasing their prestige, and sometimes of necessity when no suitable high-ranking Samoans were available.

Traditionally, Samoan marriages took two forms. Chiefly marriages were arranged and involved the elaborate and formal exchange of gifts between high-ranking families. The brides were expected to be virgins (*taupou*), and at their marriages there was a public virginity-testing ceremony. High-ranking chiefs could have multiple wives, and they could

leave earlier marriages in order to wed new *taupou* or other women. Intervillage visiting was often an occasion for pursuing courtship of new *taupou* and others, as well as for affairs.

For chiefly families, sexual relationships and marriage arrangements were a means of upward mobility. The higher the chief's title, the more important the marriages. Because the Samoan political system was not centralized, consisting instead of shifting, warring alliances, chiefly marriages were essential to alliance formation. Daughters of chiefs were used in cementing these alliances, and high-ranking families were especially concerned with controlling their daughters' sexual conduct so that it might be most effectively used in the service of family interests.

A second form of marriage, common for people of lower rank and often the result of intervillage visiting parties, was elopement or *avaga*. A couple would elope secretly, usually to the husband's village, and begin living as husband and wife. This was a publicly accepted form of marriage, although it was not arranged by the respective families nor did it involve an exchange of gifts; such an exchange might take place after time had passed and tempers had settled. As with chiefly marriages, these unions were of varying duration. If they broke up, the wife and children usually returned to the wife's village and her family. Flexible kin relationships allowed her children and descendants to be fully incorporated into their mother's kin network, while retaining connections to their father's family.

EARLY EUROPEANS AND CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES (1830–1900)

During the early years of European settlement in the nineteenth century, traditional forms of visiting, courtship, and marriage provided culturally approved means for facilitating interethnic unions. Samoan historian Malama Meleisea reports that

There were several instances recorded when Samoan men accompanied by women greeted visiting ships. It was the explicit customary role

of the *auahuma* [the organization of unmarried women] of the *nu'u* [village], led by ladies of rank, to welcome and entertain guests, with the implicit expectation that some matrimonial connections between visitors and hosts would result. For those of lower rank the connection might begin with eye contact between eligible young men and women and be pursued further during evening festivities (*pōula*). In the case of the *taupou*, the highest-ranking maiden of the *nu'u*, it was made clear that she was available to be courted as a wife by important chiefs. (1987:157)

The first Europeans to settle the Samoan archipelago were beachcombers and castaways. These men had practical skills, such as boat building, the use and repair of guns, and knowledge of the wider world; that were of real value to Samoans. So families gave their daughters in marriage to these men, some of whom had multiple wives, as well as mistresses and/or lovers.

As additional European men—missionaries, traders, and planters—settled the islands, Samoans realized that these recent arrivals were far more prestigious than the beachcombers, who eventually fell into disrepute. High-ranking marriages were arranged with many of these new and comparatively wealthy foreigners, and there were other, less visible relationships. The part-European descendants of these relationships became the *'afakasi* population, sometimes known as "half-castes," "mixed race," "mixed-blood," "local Europeans," or "part-Samoans."

Since there was no centralized colonial government in Samoa until 1900, missionaries, rather than secular officials, were often the most important European representatives involved in trying to regulate sexual conduct. First arriving in the 1830s, missionaries viewed many aspects of Samoan sexual conduct as a major barrier to conversion to Christianity. They were shocked by sexually explicit songs and dances, among other forms of alleged "immorality." Missionary John Williams witnessed one such "night dance" in the 1830s that he described as follows:

The young virgin girls taking the lead they now enter the house entirely naked & commence

their dance. The full-grown women then follow after. Then come the old women all of whom are entirely naked. During their dancing they throw themselves in all imaginable positions in order to make the most full exposure of their persons to the whole company. . . . During the whole of the time of performing the females are using the most vile, taunting, bantering language to the men. (1984:247–248)

From the missionaries' perspective, such "indecent" practices demanded immediate reform. Yet missionaries were also impressed by more sedate dances, the formal courtship of *taupou* by chiefs, and the intricate system of chiefly etiquette and protocol. They regarded Samoans as "savages," but more "noble" than other so-called "primitives," and therefore worthy of Christianity. Missionaries praised the recognition given to the ceremonial virgin. At the same time, they deplored related practices such as polygyny, the role of the unmarried women's group in intervillage visiting, the ease of sexual access in living arrangements, adultery, prostitution, public defloration of ceremonial virgins, tattooing, minimal dress, erotic dancing, and sexually explicit singing.

Missionaries made reform of Samoan sexual conduct their highest priority and, in some ways, were surprisingly successful. Yet with so few missionaries, they could not realistically attempt far-reaching changes overnight. And there were many more temporary European visitors interested in vice than missionaries interested in virtue. The Reverend A. W. Murray noted that during the mid-nineteenth century as many as six whaling ships with "lawless" crews of thirty each could anchor at any one time in the port of Apia:

There they were—men of our own colour, speaking the same language with ourselves, and some of them our own countrymen, and claiming to be Christians, while giving themselves up to the most shameful immoralities, and telling the natives all manner of lies, so far as they could make themselves understood . . . we mourned over the moral havoc they wrought, and the influence in drawing the people away from schools and services. (1876:41)

Such crewmen were interested in short-term sexual relationships, which the missionaries condemned. But Protestant and Catholic missionaries also attempted to discourage most marriages between Europeans and Samoans. Samoans, however, were quite capable of assessing their marriage prospects and would accept or reject European partners on their own. As historian Richard Gilson found,

The L.M.S. [London Missionary Society] generally opposed marriage of Samoans to Europeans, unless the latter were deemed to be of "good character" and intended to remain in the group or, if leaving, to take their families with them. Such conditions determined whether or not a European might be married in church. Sometimes the mission had sufficient influence to prevent *fa'aSamoa* [*avaga*] marriage of foreigners but if not there were still considerations of rank and exchange to be satisfied. A man who had neither valuable service nor *'oloa* [marriage goods] to offer could not marry into a high-ranking family, if he could marry at all. And unless he continued in good standing in the community, his wife might desert him. . . . That does not necessarily mean, however, that foreigners were wholly deprived of female company." (1970:143ff)

When it came to relationships with European men, Samoans valued these unions despite missionary disapproval, and missionaries had no legal authority over either Samoans or Europeans. Europeans often took advantage of Samoan visiting relationships and, misunderstanding Samoan customs concerning courtship and marriage, gave Samoan women a poor reputation throughout the South Pacific.

Short-term interethnic unions were particularly common in the European area of the port town of Apia, the second busiest port in the region. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Europeans and a growing group of poorer, rowdy part-Europeans clustered in an area called "the Beach," known throughout the South Pacific for its grog shops and dance halls. Prostitution, gambling, and drink were all available, much to the missionaries' dismay. Writing in 1892, the

author Robert Louis Stevenson, who lived in Samoa at the time, lamented that until recently, "the white people of Apia lay in the worst squalor of degradation" (1892:26). The port town was referred to as a "little Cairo" and a "hell in the Pacific." Samoans were supplying dancing girls and were rumored to be giving women in exchange for muskets.

These short-term unions were not a major concern for Samoans, who believed that desirable traits from another group could be acquired through conception of a child and that those traits were fixed at conception. Having been transmitted, the traits would eventually become evident as the child matured, whether or not the non-Samoan parent was present. This belief helps explain why "mixed race" children were so readily absorbed into Samoan families. For a number of Europeans, however, "race mixing" had a very different meaning. They believed that these unions led to dysgenic "mongrelization" of the children, bringing out the worst traits of each group.

THE PART EUROPEAN POPULATION UNDER GERMAN RULE (1900–1914)

By the late 1800s, "the Beach" was becoming more "civilized." The European population had grown from only 55 in 1855 to almost 400 by the turn of the twentieth century. When the Germans took formal political control of Samoa in 1900, the pattern of interethnic relationships, along with a growing number of children and descendants, was becoming more formal and more hierarchical. The arrival of the German administration coincided with two more general trends occurring throughout the colonies. First, more European men—planters, managers, and others—were bringing their European wives with them to the islands; they no longer needed Samoan wives. And, second, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, new ideologies of racial superiority were arriving in the islands. The increasing number of European men and women, now primarily German, as well as these new ideologies, promoted "racial" separation.

The German colonial administration wanted to protect Samoans from an influx of lower-class Europeans and, at the same time, protect resident Germans (some of whom were large plantation owners in the islands) from the dangers of "race mixing" with Samoan women. One of the first tasks of the new government was to clarify who was European—more specifically who was German—and who was not. In 1903, the administration passed laws defining the categories and rights of Europeans, part-Europeans, and Samoans. Children of legally recognized European-Samoan marriages could be classified as nominal Europeans, having the status of resident aliens in the islands. That is, they were considered citizens of their European father's country of origin. Illegitimate part-Europeans, however, were legally prohibited from inheriting their father's property and obtaining European status. Thus there came to be two types of part-Europeans.

These two types were the result of differing European attitudes about children of mixed parentage. On the one hand, a number of European fathers wished to separate their children from full Samoans by giving them special legal status, and they began doing so as early as the 1840s. The German regime recognized these marriages and legitimized their offspring. On the other hand, there were many more European fathers who had brief relationships with Samoan women or had *avaga* marriages, who were not permanent settlers, and/or who did not wish to acknowledge their children by a Samoan mother. So while some part-European children were officially registered and recognized as nominal Europeans, most children of interethnic unions were not.

To determine how many people had legitimate claims to European status, the German regime conducted a census. At the turn of the twentieth century, there were 391 Europeans in Samoa on a permanent or semi-permanent basis out of a total population of about 33,000. They constituted 1.2 percent of the total population in 1906. The legal part-European population was 2.4 percent of the

population, while almost 90 percent of the remainder were considered full Samoans. Although part-Europeans were a very small percentage of the total population in the legal sense, they were part of the much larger "mixed-blood" population. One study estimating that, by the 1930s, more than 30 percent of the population had some "mixed-blood" (Keesing 1934:456). If this figure is at all suggestive, interethnic relationships were far more common in reproductive terms than in legal terms.

Legitimate part-Europeans had more rights and privileges than illegitimate half-castes. They went to special schools where they learned a European language, were subject to a separate set of laws (allowing more and better education, permitting alcohol consumption, for example), were more often involved with the cash economy as planters, traders, or government officials due to their education, and had a separate political status that allowed them to vote as individuals.

In contrast to the small legal part-European middle and upper class, the impoverished, landless, illegitimate, Apia-based mixed-bloods were disliked by both the European and legitimate part-European communities. Marriage became a marker of social status. A number of European men, including government officials, took half-caste wives or mistresses and lost status as a result. There were also many men who thought of themselves as legitimate part-Europeans but were not legally so, and they could not inherit their father's property and social position. This meant that they could not marry European women, only part-European or Samoan women. Part-European women fared little better. They "faced the choice of casual sexual relations with white men (who were titillated by the mythical belief of the time that the natives were 'hot blooded'), in the hope of eventual marriage; or marriage with other part-Samoans; or, in the rarest of circumstances, marriage to Samoans—towards whom they had been taught to feel some degree of superiority" (Meleisea 1987:161). The children of all of these types of interethnic unions were "mongrelized" in the eyes of

Europeans as a result of race mixing, and were often downwardly mobile.

Although the German colonial administration frowned on European-Samoan unions and passed legislation to discourage them, as a practical matter, this proved difficult. German men constituted almost half of the European population in Samoa at the turn of the century, and there were a number of pre-existing German-Samoan unions. German settlers with Samoan wives and part-European children quickly protested government restrictions, stating that Samoans were not racially "inferior" and that a number of part-Europeans were prosperous planters and traders crucial to the colonial economy, rather than wayward half-castes. One German member of the Association of Racial Hygiene, trying to spread his racial views in the islands, had to be taken into protective custody to prevent his being tarred and feathered in public. On the other hand, some German-Samoan parents were so concerned about discrimination against their offspring in Germany that they sent their children to school in America and New Zealand, fearing insults and intimidation in their European homeland.

A related problem for the German regime developed around Samoan-Chinese and Samoan-Melanesian interethnic unions that resulted from the importation of Chinese and Melanesian men to meet labor shortages on the large plantations. Although interested in preserving Samoan "racial purity" as well as their own, the German colonial administration realized that the colony's prosperity depended on cheap plantation labor that Samoans would not do, and when European planters demanded additional Chinese "coolie" laborers, the administration agreed. In 1903, Samoa began importing more than 2,000 indentured Chinese male laborers, who were forbidden to bring their wives. Soon Chinese outnumbered Europeans and legal part-Europeans. Considered inferior and often treated badly, the Chinese were temporary laborers, unable to own land, and required to return to China on completion of their contracts. Officials assumed that such constraints would limit Chinese-Samoan rela-

tionships. When it became clear that interethnic unions were occurring and children were being born, the German administration passed laws prohibiting Chinese laborers from even setting foot in Samoan houses as well as forbidding Samoan women from entering Chinese quarters. These laws were only partially successful in preventing interethnic unions, and Chinese-Samoan unions would pose a major problem for the subsequent New Zealand colonial regime.

THE NEW ZEALAND COLONIAL REGIME (1914–1962)

Samoa would have remained a German colony except for the outbreak of World War I. New Zealand peacefully took over the islands in 1914 as a temporary military operation under nominal British authority. In fact, Samoa was the first German territory to be occupied as a result of World War I, and it remained a peaceful refuge from the ravages of war. But the racially based colonial hierarchy that the Germans had established would intensify under the New Zealand regime.

After World War I ended, the demography of Samoa changed markedly. Not only were New Zealand soldiers repatriated, Germans who had been held in Samoa during the war were deported. In 1914, of the roughly 600 Europeans in the islands, 373 were Germans. In 1920, after the war, most Germans were deported, significantly altering the European population. Only Germans with Samoan wives were allowed to stay, and this was due to the intervention of their wives with the government. More significant was the great worldwide flu epidemic of 1918, which devastated the Samoan population, killing almost 20 percent of Samoans and undermining support for the New Zealand occupation.

In 1920, New Zealand received an exclusive League of Nations mandate to govern Samoa, but Samoan opposition to colonial occupation was already galvanizing. The new regime was paternalistic and not well prepared to govern the islands, as the flu epidemic demonstrated. In protest against the colonial policies of New Zealand, the *Mau* (or opposition) was

formed; it was the first anticolonial movement of the twentieth century to ask for self-governance. The *Mau* became a large, very popular political organization headed by a mix of full Samoans, part-Europeans, and Europeans with Samoan wives. The administration, viewing the *Mau* as a threat, responded by increasing its military presence.

In 1928, seventy-four New Zealanders were imported for the newly created Samoa Military Police. Their presence did not really impede the activities of the *Mau*, but these New Zealanders did become involved in a number of interethnic unions. Many of the Samoa Military Police had been unemployed servicemen and were not well thought of by the European community in Samoa, including middle-class women. These men therefore sought relationships with Samoan women. Yet they would soon discover that there was a broad colonial statute prohibiting marriage to a Samoan by *any* temporary immigrant or sojourner to the islands. They were thus unable to marry the only women available to them. George Westbrook, a long-time resident of the islands whose wife was Samoan and who himself was a participant in the *Mau*, wrote: "A few, I believe became attached to those women with whom they were intimate and would have married them. Others abused the hospitality of those who entertained them and seduced their daughters" (in Field 1984:126).

Other New Zealand colonial public servants also were interested in interethnic relationships. The senior New Zealand administrator at the time recommended that his "white" staff in the Office of Native Affairs be given the opportunity to find female companionship away from Samoa in order to avoid the possibility of interethnic unions in the islands. As for those New Zealanders already married to Samoans, he felt they should be forced out of the service because they had "lowered" themselves to the level of their wives, occasionally referring to some of these women as "whores." In fact, officials in interethnic marriages were often not promoted nor were they and their wives invited to official functions where European couples were

present. In the small European community in the islands, they became outsiders.

The rationale for preventing these marriages was described in some detail by a senior administrator, who warned of their harmful effects on the European male:

His outlook is a gloomy one, for after the first flush of romance is past he quickly realizes that he has made a serious error, that his physically attractive young wife is mentally unsuited to make him a help-mate or congenial companion, while his half-breed children serve to remind him that he is permanently isolated from that which is so dear to the white man—his home and native country. With no hope of leaving the tropics and little prospects [sic] of his half-caste children becoming a credit and honour to himself owing to the drawbacks from which they suffer on account of the uneugenic mating of the parents, the European father finds himself drawn back into the Native or semi-Native circle, and ultimately gives up the struggle to maintain the prestige of his race. (in Field 1984:122)

Like the German regime before it, the New Zealand administration in Samoa reiterated the dangers of tropical temptation for European men, viewing the islands' influence as corrupting, while stressing the necessity of close and continuing contact with the home country for the maintenance of European morale. Association with Samoans was officially discouraged because it was equated with "going native."

THE CHINESE QUESTION

During the German and New Zealand colonial regimes, interethnic unions between Europeans and Samoans were disapproved, tightly regulated, and in the case of temporary European visitors banned altogether. But interethnic unions between Samoans and Chinese proved even more problematic. The economic difficulties associated with running large plantations continued after World War I, and the Chinese question that had arisen under the Germans continued as New Zealand became the colonial authority in the islands.

When New Zealand occupied Samoa under British auspices at the outset of World War I, there were almost 2,200 Chinese laborers, while Melanesian laborers numbered another 878. Like the Germans, New Zealanders were deeply concerned about the racial "pollution" of Samoans by the Chinese and Melanesians. German laws against Chinese laborers entering Samoan houses and against Samoan women entering Chinese laborers' quarters were revived by the New Zealand regime in 1917. New Zealanders also began efforts to return these laborers to China and Melanesia almost immediately. By 1918 the number of Chinese remaining in Samoa was only 838; the number of Melanesians had been reduced to 200. Nevertheless, in 1920 the colonial administration, now entirely in New Zealand hands, was still troubled by the specter of race mixing, and the regime imposed a strict law forbidding Samoan-Chinese marriages altogether. Government officials also encouraged Samoans to endorse their views of the Chinese "race menace," and a number already had done so independently.

Newton A. Rowe, a New Zealand district officer in Samoa during the mid-1920s, believed that even a reduced number of Chinese could cause racial "contamination" and were "Samoa's most present menace" (1930: 269-270). He estimated that Samoan-Chinese children numbered between 1,000 and 1,500 out of a total population of about 40,000. Despite harsh restrictions on the interaction of Chinese men and Samoan women and the outright ban on intermarriage, *avaga* marriages were taking place, children were being born, and these unions presented "no difficulties at all" for Samoans (1930:271). Rowe was upset that the Samoan custom of living together as a married couple was subverting legal efforts by the government to prevent these relationships, and that Samoans themselves were active participants in what he thought was the "demise" of their own "race." He was also frustrated that government warnings to Samoan-Chinese couples were ignored and that the law banning these interethnic marriages was not strictly enforced.

Samoan-Chinese relationships were not only banned by law, they were also frowned upon by Christian churches which had not missionized the Chinese because they were only temporary laborers. Why then were Samoans interested in these relationships? From a colonial perspective, as Rowe recounts, Chinese husbands treated their wives well and were reliable providers. "The main attraction of living with the Chinese is that the coolies give the greater part of their money to the women, who are allowed to live in complete idleness, the Chinaman even doing such housework as is done" (Rowe 1930:271). Colonel Tate, a senior New Zealand administrator, suggested that "Samoan women recognize the Chinese as better husbands than Samoan men" (in Meleisea 1987:172). Rowe also noted that family interests played a role, remarking that

For their attitude in the matter the parents of the girls are perhaps to be blamed. But there is something of the procurer and procuress in most parents. And an alliance with a foreigner is likely to be beneficial to a family in Samoa. (1930:271)

Although repatriation of Chinese laborers was a priority for the New Zealand regime, like the German regime before it, the administration needed to preserve the economic viability of the large plantations, and so importation of Chinese men was resumed and continued until 1934. More Chinese-Samoan relationships developed. In 1939 there was an administrative crackdown on these unions when thirty-four Chinese-Samoan couples were arrested. The men were sentenced to three months in prison and the women three days. After other arrests, some men were deported to China; their Samoan wives were not allowed to go with them because they were not legally married. In contrast, European-Samoan unions were disapproved by the New Zealand regime and were forbidden for temporary settlers, but couples were not arrested, prosecuted, jailed, or deported. Of the Chinese-Samoan couples who remained in Samoa, their relationships would not be legally recognized until 1961, just before

Samoa became the first independent country in the South Pacific; this was also when their children became legitimate in the eyes of the law.

INTERETHNIC RELATIONSHIPS DURING WORLD WAR II (1942–1945)

The pattern of racial exclusivity and discrimination established by the German colonial regime and its regulation of interethnic unions between Europeans, Chinese, Melanesians, and Samoans intensified under the New Zealand rule. But in the early 1940s, while Samoa was still a New Zealand colony, World War II came to the Pacific. The war years were a period of major change in the islands, including a dramatic increase in interethnic unions. Tens of thousands of American military personnel occupied Samoa from 1942 through 1945, overwhelming the local New Zealand presence as well as the Samoans. The Americans became the *de facto* colonial presence in the islands, and their agenda was quite different from New Zealand's.

W. E. H. Stanner, an anthropologist and postwar observer, described the situation as follows:

Before the main body of troops moved to forward areas in 1943–44 there may have been as many as 25,000 or 30,000 troops in Western Samoa at any one time. The turnover, of course, was much higher because of transfer of units and movement of reinforcements. The troops were dispersed throughout the islands, many defended zones were constructed, and there was an enormous temporary building programme. The troops concentrated in camps or bivouacs along the coastline, in the main areas of native settlement, so that segregation was impracticable. . . . The Samoan islands experienced immensely heightened activity, intimate contact with Europeans en masse, and economic "prosperity," all in a degree greater than in any previous period in their history. (1953: 325–326)

The military needed Samoan labor and Samoan products; 2,600 Samoans were initially employed by the Americans. Samoans

also quickly became effective small traders, restaurant and café owners, and brewers of crude but potent alcohol, leading to increases in Samoan income. Historian Mary Boyd comments that

Wine, beer and spirits were manufactured from cocoa washings and sold at great profit. Gambling, drinking, promiscuity, and prostitution flourished. Samoan relations with the Americans were notably more friendly, hospitable and generous than with New Zealanders. (1969:185)

In terms of Samoan culture, "some native ceremonies were cheapened, and in cases debauched, to attract gift-bearing Americans. A few *matai* [chiefs] appointed new *taupo* virgins, as often as not girls lacking the technical attributes, to assist hospitalities" (Stanner 1953:326). More generally, "during the military occupation men fraternized very freely with native people, approaching them, accosting them, using their houses as sprawling huts, doing violence to one cherished courtesy after another with complete indifference. The barriers were down, and easy association became epidemic" (Stanner 1953:327–328).

Wartime interethnic unions were common. Stanner states:

A great deal of sexual promiscuity occurred between Samoan or part-Samoan women and American troops. Responsible Samoans said that actual prostitution was restricted to a very small group of women. Romantic, at least friendly, relationships were very common. One mission society reported that in Upolu alone there were 1,200 known instances of illegitimate children by American soldiers from Samoan girls. The official statistics were not revealed, but put the number of known illegitimate children much lower. Only a few incidents were caused by the jealousy of Samoan men, and not much was made of them by either side. Some villages were said to have set up a special curfew for their girls, and at Falefa (near Apia) no troops except officers on business were allowed to enter *fale* [houses]. With troops so widely dispersed in an area so densely settled it is impossible to prevent familiar association.

Many soldiers regularly visited girlfriends within the villages, by no means only with single intention, but the entrance-gates to the airport, it was said, became known among Samoans as "the gates of sin." At least one *matai* [chief] was summarily expelled from his church congregation and from the society of the village on suspicion of procuring girls for prostitution. (1953:327)

The well-known author James Michener reports in a discrete but detailed manner his own participation in one such relationship. As a lieutenant, Michener was responsible for base security. Early in his western Samoan tour, he found a base where, during the day, sixty to seventy-two American men were on duty, whereas at night there were only six. Concerned about security, Michener learned that military vehicles took the men to villages at dusk, where they were dropped off to meet with their Samoan girlfriends for the evening. Michener saw first hand that these evening arrangements were openly welcomed by the Samoans. In the morning, servicemen were picked up and returned to their base. Michener himself was invited by a high-ranking Samoan chief to enter into such a relationship with his daughter and father her child (1992:38–40). As a result of his involvement, Michener felt so compromised that he never reported these relationships to his superior officers.

After the war and after the Americans had left, the New Zealand colonial government continued to discriminate against "mixed-bloods," including the children of Samoan-American unions. In fact, Samoa had the least tolerance for "mixed-bloods" in all of western Polynesia. And this would become a pressing issue as Samoa prepared for political independence in 1962. How could all the people of the islands be considered equal citizens of a new nation when discrimination, inequality, and special rights had pervaded colonial society? As political independence approached, these issues were openly addressed and partially resolved. Today interethnic unions and marriages are no longer issues for the independent state of Samoa because there are no sanctions against them.

Independence also meant a reworking of the separate ethnic identities that had been created by colonial society. These identities shifted in complex and unforeseen ways. As power shifted to Samoans, some legal part-Europeans became Samoan, taking Samoan names and chiefly titles, as well as representing their Samoan constituents in the Samoan parliament. On the other hand, as economic opportunities opened up abroad, many Samoans were willing to give up their newly gained Samoan citizenship for the opportunity to migrate overseas. In one seminal case, a Samoan woman who wanted to migrate to New Zealand filed a lawsuit, claiming that she was in reality a New Zealand citizen because she had been born under New Zealand colonial rule. She ultimately won her legal battle in the 1980s, and this landmark decision allowed large numbers of Samoans to migrate to New Zealand, where many retain dual citizenship.

As Samoans have become part of the global economy, they have taken advantage of employment opportunities abroad. In fact, most Samoans no longer live in the islands. Since the 1960s, they have migrated in large numbers to New Zealand, Hawai'i, the U.S. mainland, Australia, and over three dozen other countries. More than half of all Samoans now live permanently overseas. Intermarriage has facilitated some of this migration. Once abroad, though, Samoans continue to have a very high rate of intermarriage. In Hawai'i, for example, roughly 40 percent of Samoans have married non-Samoans. Samoan women have tended to marry whites, blacks, Hawai'ians, and part-Hawai'ians, while Samoan men have tended to marry Hawai'ians, part-Hawai'ians, and whites (Franco 1987:8). These relationships are creating new questions about what it means to be "Samoan" in the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSION

If the rules and regulations concerning interethnic unions could be so easily discarded in the late twentieth century, why were they so

important during the colonial period? The answers are straightforward. Colonial rule was based on alleged European superiority and actual European political control. Half-castes were not considered true Europeans, while Samoans were considered colonial subjects rather than genuine citizens. Moreover, Europeans wished to exploit the resources of the islands and pursue a policy of separate development for Europeans as distinct from Samoans. The existence of a substantial population of mixed-bloods raised questions about who had rights to land, property, and citizenship. It also raised questions about racial purity. So colonial concerns about who was "white" and who was "native" were not just academic questions; they were about control and power. Seemingly harmless procedures like legal categorization and the census became tools to enforce inequality. Control of interethnic sex and marriage, as well as the legal classification of children and descendants, were fundamental to the mission of the colonial state in Samoa and elsewhere in the colonial world.

The history of interethnic unions in Samoa highlights how rapidly political circumstances can change the way interethnic unions are viewed. In the nineteenth century, these unions were allowed and encouraged by both Samoans and Europeans before political consolidation under the Germans. But in the early twentieth century, these same unions became regulated, discouraged, and punished, Chinese-Samoan unions even more so than European-Samoan unions. When the Americans overwhelmed the islands during World War II, the New Zealand colonial regime could not effectively control them, and interethnic unions dramatically increased. These changing patterns of interethnic unions, sometimes occurring over a very brief period, demonstrate that the boundaries established by colonial authorities were not precisely fixed but flexible, at least to some extent. Finally, with the decolonization of Samoa in 1962, much of the stigma on these unions was lifted. Just as the spread of colonial authority had restricted interethnic unions in Samoa and elsewhere, the demise

of colonialism and the globalization of democracy helped lift these restrictions.

In America today, we view colonial attitudes and laws about race, sex, and intermarriage as hopelessly outdated. We sometimes ask how, in the twentieth century, people could justify the arbitrary regulation, punishment, and banning of interethnic unions. Yet in our own country laws prohibiting interracial marriages were widespread until very recently. Many states had antimiscegenation laws until a 1967 Supreme Court decision ruled them unconstitutional. At one time, laws against interracial marriages were on the books in forty of forty-eight states. In Alabama, the following law remained in the state's constitution until the year 2000; it stated that: "The legislature shall never pass any law to authorize or legalize any marriage between any white person and a Negro, or a descendant of a Negro." In 2000, Alabamans repealed this law by a vote of 60 percent to 40 percent in favor of equal treatment of all marriages and their descendants (Sengupta 2000:WK p. 5).

Our own history of the regulation of interethnic relationships mirrors Samoa's. And reminders of this not-so-distant past crop up in unexpected places. During World War II, when American servicemen were happily involved in relationships with Samoan women, Americans back home were deeply disturbed by the thought of interethnic marriages and the children of these unions. In his best-selling book about the war, *Tales of the South Pacific*, James Michener included a story line about a European-Polynesian union and their children, upsetting many American readers. The year was 1947. When Rodgers and Hammerstein turned Michener's novel into the Broadway musical *South Pacific*, they retained the controversial themes of forbidden interethnic unions and the children they produced. They wanted to remind Americans of how much prejudice there still was in America. *South Pacific* became one of America's favorite musicals and is still performed today. Yet that particular story line seems dated, especially in light of so many intermarriages in both real life and the media. What

was once taboo provides us with a window on just how far we have come in our own attitudes about interethnic relationships.

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NOTE

1. In this chapter, Samoa refers to the country and area formerly known as Western Samoa. In 1997, the parliamentary government of Western Samoa approved changing the country's name to Samoa.

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