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# **A Fale Samoa at Tropical Islands Resort, Germany: Performing Samoa to the World**

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Past lessons, present stories, future lives**

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## **Introduction: Performing Samoa in Germany<sup>1</sup>**

Googling for an image of a *fale Samoa* (traditional Samoan house) in 2005, Albert Refiti stumbled across an aerial photo of the former CargoLifter hangar on the former Soviet military airbase, 60 kilometres southeast of Berlin. The roof looked at first like that of a gigantic *fale afolau*, but a closer investigation of the context revealed that the *fale* was actually inside it: the hangar houses the *Tropical Islands Resort*, where a *fale Samoa* forms part of a *Tropical Village* and where, from April to November 2005, “The Call of the South Seas” was the evening attraction.

Further investigation of the *Tropical Islands* website raised interesting questions about the relationships between Samoan cultural forms and their iconic representation within globalised tourism and leisure environments. For instance, what was the involvement of Samoan professionals and communities? How do collaborations between Germans and Samoans pan out today, and how do they compare with the Samoan shows organized in nineteenth and twentieth century Germany?<sup>2</sup> How do German visitors and local communities relate to the appearance of the *fale Samoa* and to the performers of “The Call of the South Seas” show?<sup>3</sup>

This is how our project “Tropical Islands – Virtual Worlds” began. Its goal was to assemble a range of perspectives on the history and context of this *fale* that would contribute to an

understanding of Pacific and global cultural exchange. Between 2006 and 2009 we carried out interviews, observation, visual documentation and archival research to explore the *fale*'s conception, production and reception. This paper gives an overview of our project and its context, and presents some of the perspectives, mostly Samoan, on the *fale*'s role at the resort.

### **The Setting: *Tropical Islands Resort*, Brand**

The Samoan *fale*, on its oval platform, is set almost exactly in the centre of the Tropical Village, its thatched roof visible from some distance. The open space, bounded only by handmade pandanus mats and carved poles, signals the eternal sun and balmy breeze of the South Seas. Carving, weaving and lashing details tell of an alternative way of life and an imaginary place where time runs at a different pace, and where simplicity harbours happiness. At equal distance from the South Sea beach and the Bali Lagoon, it houses the Matai-Lounge for holders of the "Black Diamond Card" or guests who have booked the "Maharajah for one Day" package.<sup>4</sup>

This scheme was conceived by the then 55-year-old Chinese-Malaysian multi-millionaire Colin Au to cater for a clientele unwilling or unable to travel to "real" resorts. In 2003, for approx. 55.7 million tala, Au purchased the disused CargoLifter hangar and, to "bring the tropics to Germany", spent another 220 million to set up the resort inside. It would satisfy a typical German yearning for sun and provide an experience of the tropics "at home".

With an image of a Samoan *fale*, Au visited the Samoan Tourism Association (STA) in Apia, who helped him get it built from local materials, by local *tufuga*, for his resort. In 2005, the resort's website advertised the *fale* as a "typical Polynesian straw hut" for "tropical living", whose "walls are made of woven mats which are lowered only when it rains or when the winds are strong" (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005c). A sort of "community house"

for several villages, it was said to be “particularly large”; “each of the 28 beautifully carved wooden posts” supposedly representing “one of the participating extended families”.<sup>5</sup> While exaggerating, the website was somewhat congruent with the resort’s physical reality until 2007.

From April to November 2005, “80 dancers and musicians from Samoa [brought] the authentic south seas feeling to the *Tropical Islands Resort*” (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2008). Their show, “Call of the South Seas”, began with “a short journey across Polynesian history: The settlement of the islands in the South Pacific Ocean, fights for the scarce land, reconciliation and marriage, Christianisation and colonialism” (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005a).<sup>6</sup> Following the historical introduction, a pan-Pacific “*fiafia* night” featured “the temperament and the friendliness, the joy of life and the famous ‘swivelling hips’ of the South Pacific islands” (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005b). Over the next six to eight months, the dancers performed the same show, choreographed by Matafeo Reupena Matafeo (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005a). According to the website, the “merry dance show” touched the audiences’ longings. Its unparalleled “authenticity” was made possible by Samoan assistance, and the songs and dances (more so than the *fale* as a building) were said to aptly express “the culture of the South Seas”, since nothing seems “intended to last to eternity in this paradise of ‘living into the day’” (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005a).

Certainly, nothing lasted very long at *Tropical Islands Resort*. Although the STA thought the show was the beginning of an ongoing collaboration between the resort and themselves, no further engagements followed.

## Research on location and local experience

The above, in broad outline, was the picture emerging from general literature and web research and a preliminary site visit to the resort. An important aspect of our research project though, was engagement with specific experiences and interpretations. In 18 in-depth, open interviews with Samoan and German professionals, community members and representatives, we explored their views of the production of the *fale* and the performance of the show.<sup>7</sup> The emphasis here will be on Samoan perspectives regarding organisation, construction of the *fale* and the performance in Germany.

### *Samoan perspectives*

The STA was Au's first port of call in Samoa and remained his point of contact throughout the collaboration with Tropical Islands Resort (TIR). Au wanted the *fale* to be built exactly like the picture he brought with him; a picture of a *fale afolau*. He didn't know the finer details, but wanted an oval shape. The STA organised an informational tour and helped with the selection of the type of *fale*: a *fale fa'aiviivi* (but round, *lapotopoto*; Vitale Feaunati, VF). The STA then mobilised and organised traditional builders and performers; called for tenders; negotiated with Au about materials and processes; and employed builders, school classes and the troupe who would later perform the "Call of the South Seas" in Germany. TIR management financed the entire project which was, according to STA's manager Sala Pio Tagiilima (SPT),<sup>8</sup> "a good thing because we didn't have any money".<sup>9</sup>

After some consideration, work on the *fale* was commissioned under *palagi* contract, as the builders would have to leave the country to work overseas. The *tufuga fau fale* were given plans provided by Au, which showed the foundations, the platform and *pou* (poles), and the superimposed *fau* (arch) structure. The *tufuga* added their own ideas, such as the carved posts, to make the *fale* "more presentable and more beautiful". Different materials were produced in different villages: "Everyone came from all over Samoa, especially the older

men because they're the ones who usually do the *afa*". (SPT) A total of 42 *poumuli* from Falealili were carved on commission by students of Pelenako, the Head of the Leulumoega School (VF). The plans placed the entrance in the *tala*,<sup>10</sup> "rather than the proper entrance through the front" (VF), probably to provide access to a bar underneath the platform. "Samoan building techniques [were] disregarded. What they ... wanted was just the look ... of the *fale*. It's meaningless to the *fa'a Samoa*" (VF). The STA was not informed that a bar would be placed underneath the concrete platform, however, "we are in a modern world. The look of the *fale*, that's what we [the STA] were concerned with. ... we still maintain[ed] the feel and look of the Samoan *fale*" (SPT). This was important because the STA hoped the *fale* would attract visitors to Samoa.<sup>11</sup>

The *tufuga*, working under *palagi* contract, were each paid directly by the STA. This seems to have caused the initial *matua faiva* (head builder) to abandon the project. He wanted payment to be made in the traditional way, where he would receive the money and distribute it to the builders according to rank (VF). The builders who completed the contract in Germany "had their own grievances", mainly to do with German building and health and safety regulations. Thus, they felt disrespected when the building inspectors "strongly recommended" the addition of a centre post to the *fale fa'aiviivi* to support the roof load, not accepting the argument that this was a proven traditional design. The builders had to point out that the enormous dome hangar also functioned without centre post (SPT). Nevertheless, ultimately, the fact that their work was "showcased in Germany" (SPT) to represent Samoa outweighed negative aspects. The builders were pleased that visitors were impressed with the *fale*'s craftsmanship and took many photos (VF). Unfortunately, the *tufuga*'s visas ran out so that they had to leave before the *fale* was blessed.

The blessing occurred in December 2004, when tourism minister Joe Keil travelled to Germany with a group of eight or nine dancers. An 'ava ceremony and prayer service were

followed by the cutting of the ribbon. “So you could say it was a more modern opening ceremony, although the ‘ava ceremony was performed” (SPT).

The main group of dancers arrived in April 2005. Many were school leavers who had never travelled overseas before. The “24/7 of fun” environment (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005d) entailed for the performers a “strict discipline”. “They were held indoors” at the resort or had to “remain at the hotel” (SPT). “Some of them were homesick, some ... resorted to alcohol” (SPT).<sup>12</sup> Due to confused contractual arrangements, insufficient communication between TIR management and STA, and inadequate travel preparations, the dancers’ needs appear to have been ignored in the first months (SPT).<sup>13</sup> Also, many performers were ill prepared to adapt to local requirements. Issues arose around security, maintenance and work ethics.<sup>14</sup> The performers were constantly cold in a climate they were neither accustomed to, nor properly equipped for (BN). Payment, which had been promised as “attractive”, turned out to be around 1 Euro per hour.<sup>15</sup> The low wages were particularly disappointing for those who had joined the troupe for the income. In a climate of disappointment, rumours began to proliferate. Internal disagreement and favouritism lead to discrimination – two dancers were once “banned from the dome” and received nothing but breakfast at the hotel (MR). The relationships with co-workers were mixed: in some cases, collaboration appears to have been reliably friendly and collegial, in others it was fraught. Some dancers became aware of the region’s social problems: insecurity, poverty and unemployment (BN).

The troupe performed between 10am and 10pm at *Tropical Islands*. Matafeo had previously convinced the TIR management that it was unnecessary to involve groups from different Pacific Islands because the Samoan troupe could perform all their dances, an attitude some considered arrogant.<sup>16</sup> When it came to the design of the programme, some interviewees implied that he was not inclined to consultation before decision making.<sup>17</sup> Once determined,

the music for the main show was burnt to CD and stayed the same for the entire eight months. During the shorter day shows, the performers sometimes danced for special guests seated in the *fale*, for instance for Joe Keil when he came to the resort. For two dancers and their leader, the *fale* was a symbol of home and they expressed pride in its beauty, materiality and craftsmanship. At the beginning of the contract, the dancers spent time close by, but this soon diminished because they were not allowed to enter. They would sometimes talk about the *fale* with visitors and realised that Germans did not recognise the *fale* as Samoan because no explanation was normally given, nor was there any planned interaction that could have provided a context. Generally, Germans found it difficult to imagine how Samoans would live in open *fale Samoa* (BN).

In those conversations, it became obvious that most Germans know nothing about Samoa today, not even its location, and certainly not that it was once part of Germany and that Samoans were once compatriots (KR, BN). In contrast, two of the interviewed dancers chose to go to Tropical Islands partly because of their German ancestry. Unfortunately, most dancers were insufficiently prepared and had no material available with which to explain Samoa to Germans (BN). That may have been irrelevant at the resort, because one of the dancers commented that the type of German who would travel to Samoa did not go there,<sup>18</sup> and that neither the *fale* nor performances could have put Samoa on the map as a tourist destination (BN). Shows outside the resort (in Berlin, Stuttgart, and Munich, as well as in Poland) might have been more effective and they were certainly more enjoyable (and possibly more profitable).<sup>19</sup> People in those locations showed more interest than at the resort, except perhaps during the Samoan festival at the resort, when workshops about Samoan arts and crafts, as well as dancing lessons, generated questions about Samoa as a destination (KR).

An interesting and possibly unanticipated aspect of the tour was that many, particularly the *afekasi* troupe members, learned “a lot” about their Samoan culture that they had not known before (KR).<sup>20</sup> They learned this from the large number of dancers from the villages, from “the real Samoan community”. For these and many other reasons, most dancers would have also gained something from the experience of being outside Samoa, learning a bit of German and gaining independence – even if they might not want to repeat the experience (BN, KR, MR). None of the dancers we talked to, though, went primarily for economic reasons and they felt sorry for those who did. Their own considerations included their dance career, German ancestry, or (a hope shared by the Minister of Tourism and STA) a general desire for life experience outside Samoa. The experiences were quite mixed, however. Some performers made friends and found partners in Germany. Others were less lucky and experienced unwanted pregnancies and the end of previously stable relationships in Samoa. All worked long hours, were unable to leave the compound or their hotel, and eventually did not even earn enough to travel through Germany. To all appearances, there were remarkable parallels to the nineteenth and twentieth century Samoan shows.

### *German perspectives*

Since the German aspects of the project (see references) have already been published, this section will be brief and less descriptive.

The appearance and function of the *fale Samoa* have changed significantly since 2005. In its initial configuration, the presentation was delivered with a sense of quality and an informational purpose, and for an educated, well-heeled audience. Unfortunately, Au knew the Germans far less than he thought: his middle class target market never materialised (SZ). In 2006, losses led to a re-conceptualisation and re-design of the resort, and of the Tropical Village in particular. The various tropical houses were initially placed on a bare concrete floor in such a way that they seemed like islands themselves. The walk from one house to

another could indeed feel like a travel from island to island, even if bizarrely short. After the re-design, however, the fale lost its free standing position and its free space in front and became instead one of several props on a “plaza” that serves as eatery and entertainment venue. While the fale’s initially restricted access was elitist, its unused interior also preserved a mystery and a degree of integrity. In 2007, visitors strolled in and out of the fale, hardly taking notice of it as a space. In 2008, finally, it had been turned into a smokers’ lounge with a similar degree of attraction and integrity as those at airports. Not one of 12 visitors could identify the Samoan fale – even though we asked six in its immediate vicinity.

At the time of our first interviews, Au had retired from management and many errors that affected the experiences of the dancers or the fate of the *fale* were im- or explicitly attributed to him and his wrong assessment of market forces. Clearly, the financial bottom line was a decisive factor in all decisions concerning the *fale* and performances. Due to two re-positionings, increasingly as a fun- and wellness-park, the *fale*’s cultural impact has, over the six years since 2005, been constantly reduced. In its current, run-down state as a smoking lounge and part-time bar, the *fale* falls well short of its builders’ and Samoan brokers’ expectations: to create a Samoan presence in Germany.

In summary, the sense of connection that was sometimes palpable in the Samoan interviews did not exist in Germany. German professionals and members of the public corroborated the Samoans’ impression that very few Germans are aware of past or present connections with Samoa. Not surprisingly, and despite the STA’s expectation to return for another show in 2007, the regular involvement of indigenous performers from the tropics was abandoned during the 2006 overhaul. Visitors seemed less interested than expected in “authentic” tropical shows – authenticity represented an unnecessary cost factor (SZ).

## *New Zealand: A student's perspective*

To counteract this development, I offered a studio in the Bachelor of Spatial Design in 2009. Students were to design an intervention that would change people's perception of the *fale Samoa's* at *Tropical Islands Resort*. Benita Kumar Simati excelled in this project and later continued her involvement with issues of *fa'a Samoa*:

Amongst the hundreds of images supplied by Tina, one in particular grabbed my interest. It showed the *fale Samoa's* interior as a smokers' lounge, with ash trays filled to the brim and tables with half-empty whiskey glasses. This photo not only took me by surprise about how easily culture can be misused, it also drew me closer to my own understanding and experience of a *fale Samoa* (I had never before drawn on my Samoan identity and certainly was not expert in *fa'a Samoa*). It bothered me that the visitors at the resort could not understand the significance of a *fale Samoa*. To approach this significance, I explored *lalava* (lashing) as technique and metaphor. Following Albert Refiti, *lalava* ('stirring the *vā*') influences the relationships that constantly define and redefine themselves, relationships between people and things, here in the space between two cultures.

The key element of my design was based upon the *fale Samoa's* architectural parts. Deconstructing its elements, then – unfolding the *lalava* – dispersing them throughout the resort, each part became visible in its own meaning and its own place within the *fale*. Each part was seen as bleached, tied, died, bent or smoothed – giving an impression of skill and craftsmanship involved in traditional Samoan buildings. Following the path set up by the sequence, visitors become part of a *vā* that culminates at the *fale Samoa* at the Tropical Village. The purpose of my intervention was to convey the complexity and variety of Samoan culture, and the need to understand connections and relationships that constitute the *vā*. The *vā* is not, as often in Western conceptions, a vacant space waiting to be filled. Rather, it is a space of woven connections, providing context and meaning.

The questions about *fa'a Samoa*, the *vā*, and the spatial relationships that consist within, strangely brought me closer to my own diasporic identity. My growing interest led me on to postgraduate study. As currently the only postgraduate student in the 'Māori and Oceanic Space' cluster, in an institution dedicated to Western knowledge, it is often difficult to explore my interests, to explain myself and to clarify my standpoint for a project. Thanks to a strong team of supervisors, and a supportive community of indigenous researchers in Aotearoa, I nevertheless successfully completed my honours project "The Potential of the *Vā*" and am now enrolled in a Master of Art and Design. I have come to realise that our perception of who we are is not so much determined by how much we know, but our willingness to learn.

My aim is to contribute to the field of Indigenous Studies in the School of Art and Design, working with Pacific concepts. Ultimately, I aim to do this by furthering my studies through PhD research upon completion of the MA&D and becoming a permanent member of the teaching staff.

## **Global research: frameworks, exchange and participation**

Benita's comments about working in an institution dedicated to Western knowledge are pertinent to the whole of our research project. This research environment imposed limitations that manifested, for instance, as budgetary and time constraints, ethical considerations, lack of time spent in Samoa (for me) and Germany (for Albert), and a lack of connections with

Samoa communities and researchers. The globalised relationships and processes typical of *Tropical Islands Resort* found their equivalent in the research project – necessitating not only travel but communication across different systems of knowledge. Finally, the research process constantly threw up questions of exchange and participation.

The forms of productivity that have become the hallmarks of the contemporary university in the global knowledge economy rely on efficient input-output of information and accounting for time (Grierson 2006: 74). This leaves little space for research that cannot immediately be transformed into outputs. In our case, budget and time constraints impacted not only on the data collection but even more so on data analysis. Competing teaching and management commitments severely limited the time we could spend on a full and sustained reading and analysis of transcripts. Standardised ethics regulations got in the way more than once, and the limited time I was able to spend in Samoa was a problem, since I lack an insider's understanding of Samoan culture. On every brief visit, I encountered yet another "Samoa" I found hard to contextualise. None of these visits was long enough to build lasting connections with local community representatives or fellow researchers,<sup>21</sup> which was vital to ensure maximal relevance of the research to Samoan concerns.

The global conditions of the fale's production exemplify how Samoan cultural tourism strategies are submerged in global flows whose effects cannot always be fully anticipated by decision makers. The performance troupe's situation at *Tropical Islands Resort* was of an unusual complexity and Au's role in the scheme is indeed interesting. If "decolonisation is about the creation of a new symbolic and material order that takes the full spectrum of human history" (Maldonado-Torres, 2004: 36), Au adds to this spectrum the confidence of a de-colonised Malaysian entrepreneur in his capitalist rationality and his culture's building traditions.<sup>22</sup> He has, however, also caused misinformation and exploitation in his insistence on the "iconic authenticity"<sup>23</sup> provided by indigenous Samoan craftsmen and performers. In

Germany, Au was not very popular amongst the local population (who found him elitist and unresponsive) and many of his staff (who resented the discrepancy between his self-confidence and lack of understanding of the local situation). Au's poor understanding of the local appears to have triggered some ruinous decisions that ultimately necessitated the 2006 re-haul. The performers must have felt the first consequences. A Samoan witness at the resort thought they got "the butt end of the deal" under a scheme taking advantage of poor people. "It's back to the colonial days again, except, its not the Germans doing the damage in Samoa, it's Colin Au ... while the Germans look the other way" (Goddess of Savaii, 2009).<sup>24</sup> With a slight reservation, the comment seems valid from a German perspective, but when do other Samoans notice the same, and what else is notable from a Samoan perspective? From my perspective, it seems clear the resort's repositioning as fun-park, and the commercialisation of every square inch, meant that all educational pretences were abandoned, the *fale* was used as a smoking lounge, and the shows were no longer performed by indigenous people. Thus, in 2009, the show "Mythen der Südsee" (South Seas Myths)<sup>25</sup> was set in scene and performed by Bogdan Zajac, a Polish world champion in sports acrobatics, and his troupe Ozelot.

How would Samoans want to frame this debate, whose voices count, and what place is there for non-Samoan or non-resident Samoan researchers? What, in all this, was the involvement of Samoan communities? As an outsider, I got no sense of community involvement beyond ad-hoc participation or commercial transactions. However, I frequently sensed that interview participants somehow communicated selectively – more on- than off-record. In hindsight, we were probably not in a good position to identify participating communities and their positions, even though it appeared that there must have been some degree of conflict between them. Visible even to us, views differed whether the performers' trip to Germany had an educational value contributing to equity (see, Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1994: 71), and whether therefore the tacit acceptance of exploitative working conditions was justified.

If, as Paton and Fairbairn-Dunlop suggest (2010: 688), multiple perspectives are necessary to help paint a full picture of the issues a community faces, an interpretation of the data we collected should be performed in collaboration with Samoan researchers and communities. This is one reason why this paper often remains on a descriptive level. By presenting to you today, though, I hope to find some middle ground, to negotiate a space (Du Plessis and Fairbairn Dunlop, 2009: 111) where our research might initiate a conversation. While there have been people supporting us in our processes and decisions in Auckland and at AUT, and I would specifically like to mention I'u Tuagalu here, a greater community is needed to proceed with this research.

But is it even relevant to Samoan concerns? In my darker moments, I doubt it. Then again, Albert Wendt identified education and architecture as “two ways in which *papalagi* imperialism has changed Oceania” (Chi, 1997: 73).<sup>26</sup> The *Tropical Islands Resort* project arguably involved both. Given the exponentially growing, global commodification of indigenous cultures, this is an increasingly critical issue. From the limited information gathered so far, there are some issues that need further research, as described below.

*Tufuga* were and are guardians of knowledge of architecture and art, areas that have evolved into a semi-globalised industry. *Tufuga* maintain, on the one hand, a traditional craft and, on the other, serve a global leisure industry's desire for an “authentic dwelling experience” at or away from home. The conflict about modalities of payment, noted above, indexes significant changes in the *tufuga* guild's practice over the last 30 years. The *fale* for *Tropical Islands* is only a recent example of a trend that began at the turn of the twentieth century, when *tufuga* began to build houses for export. In these projects, the *tufuga* appear to have had no real control over contracts, which have been handled by middle-men or cultural brokers. The *matua faiva* has become a construction manager, with some traditional ritual functions of elders on site

who are, for instance, responsible for prayers. Other aspects in the development of the *tufuga* guild's practice includes, for instance, the shift from an extended body practice that used the building site as a laboratory to a practice submitted to the division of labour, which requires working drawings and prefabrication before the building can be built. Albert Wendt's PhD research addresses these questions.<sup>27</sup>

More research is also needed on the realities of the users or consumers of this "authentic dwelling experience" and how this experience links to the realities of cosmopolitan life. From the limited observations in Germany, for instance, "authenticity" means different things to different people. A better understanding would help make better predictions about intensities and longevity of Pacific projects overseas.<sup>28</sup> This includes questions of how the *fale Samoa* has become an icon for cultural identity in Samoa, New Zealand and Australia. The house has become an index of identity rather than serving as the marker for a Samoan family's standing in the village *malae*. This function is relevant in the context of discussions about architecture's iconicity in a global context. Similar concerns apply to the performance of Samoan culture and identity, in Samoa and overseas.

To learn from past engagements such as that with *Tropical Islands*, frameworks need to develop to consider both global Western theoretical insights and local Pacific ones. Non-hierarchical dialogue between these different positions, bringing into play forms of imagination and critical approaches from both positions, is perhaps "the only way to 'approximate truth'" (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002: 319) and predict with some certainty the potential for balanced and sustainable Samoan tourism and cultural exchange.

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<sup>1</sup> “Performance” has more than one meaning in this context. One is, of course, the presentation of Samoan culture and history on stage. Another is Judith Butler’s term for the repeated enactment and articulation of established identity repertoires, in this case not only by the performers on-stage, but also by the *tufuga fau fale* who built the *fale* for the Tropical Village. According to Butler, identity is “tenuously constituted in time, ... in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.” (Butler, 1990: 140). Established conventions are important here, since without reference to “prior and authoritative set[s] of practices, a performative action cannot succeed” (Butler, 1996: 206). In our context, established conventions are likely to be very different for performers and audiences: fa’a Samoa on one side, clichés of Samoa as a South Seas island on the other – the fact that the German period in Samoa constitutes a shared point of reference makes the matter even more complicated. Henry Bial remarks that “much of what we call culture is in fact performance. A community’s performances reflect and embody its values, beliefs, and traditions.” (Bial, 2007: 321) Each performance shapes those values and traditions and therefore to understand performance is “critically important in an age when the world’s economic, social, cultural, and ideological systems are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. ... Performance offers a means to resist the transcultural homogenization of globalization, as well as a means to hasten its arrival.” (321)

<sup>2</sup> From 1890 to 1914, Samoan performance troupes visited Germany on six occasions. The first was organised by Bailey and Barnum, all others by Carl and Fritz Marquardt. Jutta Steffen-Schrade (1998) gives a detailed account of the Samoan shows at the Frankfurt Zoological Gardens in 1896, 1897, 1901 and 1910. The Marquardt shows would have been inspired by Hagenbeck’s economically successful *Naturvölker* exhibitions. Despite their avowed intention to promote *Bildung* (education), they employed a narrow range of stereotypes to provide mass entertainment, stimulate erotic fantasies, and confirm assumptions of anthropological and social hierarchies. This strategy was closely intertwined with colonial politics: Samoa became a German colony in 1900, and exposing the “new compatriots” to the German audiences’ gaze and touch was also propaganda. (Corbey, 1993: 10; see also Balme, 2007).

A century later, colonialism has given way to globalization: thus, *Tropical Islands Resort* was not planned and implemented by a German government or entrepreneur, but by the Malaysian consortium of Tanjong Plc and Au Leisure Investments Pte Ltd. All the more stunning is the similarity in flavours between the advertisements in turn-of-the-century Frankfurt for the Samoan shows and the 2005 Samoan performance at *Tropical Islands Resort*. Again, misunderstandings and ignorance led to complications and conflict. As a century earlier, venue and staging of events appealed to European fantasies, provided entertainment, and purported to educate. In both cases, the transport of bodies and objects was not matched by the transport and mediation of a cultural context. Rather than incrementally realising a potential that perhaps cannot be conveyed in a Samoan idiom (see Benjamin, 1969: 80), what was presented involved no mediation but relied on stereotypes the non-Samoan audience was presumed to hold.

<sup>3</sup> More broadly, what can be learned from different forms of Samoan engagement with cultures elsewhere? Which frameworks could help not only to understand past and present, but also future potential for balanced, efficient and sustainable Samoan tourism and cultural exchange? For instance, a goal in the the preparation of the Samoa Tourism Development Plan 2002-2006 was to “provide a framework and process that ensures a balanced, coordinated, practical and efficient approach to the sustainable development of tourism in Samoa” (Pearce, 2008). What would these goals mean in the context of the *Tropical Islands Resort*?

<sup>4</sup> “Spend 24 royal hours at Tropical Islands, enjoy all the privileges of an island maharajah for 24 hours.” *My Day in Paradise* (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005f).

This paragraph is from the introduction to our 2006 funding application and greatly inspired by the website’s marketing style.

<sup>5</sup> Which “participating extended families” are represented by the “carved wooden posts” is unclear. Perhaps someone at STA supplied some of these statements – their support is acknowledged on the website. Sala Pio Tagiilima considered the story a “marketing thing”. The Tropical Village includes “authentic houses from 6 tropical regions of the world”, which “were constructed on site at Tropical Islands by craftsmen from their respective home countries” (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2005e). The “authentic” *fale*’s elevated cement platform, however, does not rest on the ground but forms the ceiling of a public bar. No more than nine metres long, the *fale* is hardly “particularly large”. In 2005, cane furniture and gauze fabrics inside connoted the British Raj more than the Pacific.

<sup>6</sup> When, upon Au’s request (MR), a German flag was hoisted on stage to symbolise German colonisation in Samoa (1900-1914), the audience seemed perplexed. There is no living popular memory of a Samoan colony in Germany and, since the show was only moderated at the very beginning to save costs, the audience received no clues. To add to the confusion, it seems likely that the flag was the current German flag, not the Deutsche Reich flag of 1900.

<sup>7</sup> Six Samoan professionals included the manager of the Samoan Tourism Authority in Apia, one of the leaders of the dance troupe, three dancers, and one of the *tufuga* involved in the project over its whole duration. On the

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German side, a senior TIR marketing expert and a TIR designer were interviewed, as well as the manager of the local tourism bureau. Five German visitors to the resort and five members of the Samoan public/community representatives were also interviewed. In both countries, the interviews were complemented by participant observation, visual documentation and site analyses. Several site visits of Samoan resorts informed the analysis of the German resort's visual and performance strategies. An extensive collection of our own photos has undergone some preliminary analysis, together with an equally extensive archive of photos collected from publicly available sources. The provisional results were discussed with the members of our reference group – in three formal meetings of the whole group and ongoing contact with individual members (Marilyn Kohlhase, l'u Tuagalu, Keri-Anne Wikitera and Assoc. Prof. Eveline Dürr, the latter until early 2009 when she departed to take up a position as professor at Munich University).

A certain amount of literature and web research was conducted prior to the formal research process. In January 2006, Tina conducted a first, informal site visit at Tropical Islands Resort, together with a German sociologist who had worked in projects in many parts of the world. The first interviews were conducted in Apia by Albert and Tina in September 2006. Their analysis led on to a series of interviews conducted by Tina in Germany in January 2007. Further interviews were conducted by Albert and Tina in Samoa in March 2008 and by Tina in February 2009 in Apia and in November 2008 in Germany. From 2006 to the completion of the project in 2009, literature and archival research was ongoing.

Over the course of the project, we explored a range of possible frameworks for interpretation, which I cannot discuss here. While Albert worked between Samoan and Western thought, my own approaches started from the German side: Walter Benjamin's ideas on translation and his accounts of world exhibitions, which led to an exploration of Jacques Rancière's partitioning of the sensible/visible. Increasingly, the emphasis shifted towards postcolonial notions such as Orientalism (Said) and Third Space (Bhabha). Just recently, Albert, Keri-Ann Wikitera and I have begun to think about an approach to research that Albert calls "genealogical relationships of exchange". While these theoretical explorations have influenced our research as much as the empirical data, there is no space here to discuss them – the publications they generated are included in the references (Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009; Engels-Schwarzpaul & Fitchett, 2010; Engels-Schwarzpaul & Wikitera, 2009a, 2009b; Refiti, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). They are nearly all available online (<http://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/browse?type=author&value=Refiti%2C+A> and <http://aut.academia.edu/TinaEngelsSchwarzpaul>).

Over the course of the project, we have also surveyed relevant literature on tourism, architectural and cultural criticism, as well as anthropological and philosophical texts. A discussion will be included in the final project report, together with a full bibliography, an overview of theoretical frameworks, summarized interviews, a collection of images and compilations of online sources. The report will be lodged in the Apia and the NUS libraries.

<sup>8</sup> Some interview participants did not want to remain anonymous. Their names are mentioned here in the first instance, where after their name is replaced with initials. Interview participants who wished to remain anonymous or had no preference have been allocated arbitrary initials.

<sup>9</sup> The fact that the project was financed exclusively by the Tropical Islands management severely reduced Samoan influence, though. Sala Pio Tagiilima is optimistic that, if an opportunity was presented from outside again, STA or the Minister of Tourism would "go out of their way to support" a project financially that would clearly benefit Samoan tourism. (SPT)

<sup>10</sup> The method has a precedent at the Sinalei Reef Resort in Upolo, where the entrances to two *fale tele* are also through the tala, "cutting out" *fa'a Samoa*.

<sup>11</sup> German visitors to Apia later talked about the performance, but nobody mentioned the *fale*.

<sup>12</sup> Two were recalled home due to "constant disorderly and drunken behaviour" (Sio, 2005, 25 May).

<sup>13</sup> Isolated in their lodgings at an ex-Stasi hotel in the forests nearby, the dancers were not allowed to leave the group. After approximately three months, the group started to fall apart (BN).

A large part of the problems appears to have resulted from a lack of good planning and a lack of consultation, resulting in insufficient co-ordination and ill timing. "Last time was too fast, too fast, but everyone was all excited, especially over the fact it was all based over there! We organised a big group and then we went. ..." (SPT)

<sup>14</sup> Sometimes, dancers were suspected of "playing games or trying to avoid performing", even when taken to hospital (SPT)

<sup>15</sup> The 2004 minimum sector wages in East Germany ranged between 7 and 10€hr, see <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2005/07/study/tn0507101s.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, Professor Aiono Dr Fanaafi Le Tagaloa. In addition to Samoan items, the dancers were taught Cook Island, Fiji, Tokelau, and Tongan dances by natives of those cultures, mostly before they left for Germany.

<sup>17</sup> Conversely, he would not have been consulted by the Tropical Islands management about a video trailer ("Holiday and Night" <http://www.tropical-islands.de/abb/video.htm>) on the website during the troupe's performance which exposed fragments of women from a mix of cultures, a topless glimpse included, to the soundtrack of 'Pacific' music. The trailer would have framed visitors' expectations of the show.

<sup>18</sup> This was confirmed by the marketing expert at TIR (SZ).

<sup>19</sup> Some dancers had relatives living in Stuttgart and who also came to the resort to watch the show. This was experienced as comforting and alleviating homesickness (KR).

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<sup>20</sup> Thus, one dancer we interviewed first learned about the 'ava ceremony while at the resort.

<sup>21</sup> Albert and I had even underestimated the difficulties even of finding time to collaborate on the project at home, where we were both responsible for the management of departments.

<sup>22</sup> Confronted with German building inspectors' requests for exact measurements of a bamboo tower, he asserts that "we have been building bamboo towers for thousands of years" without measuring them (Harding, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> As an icon, the Samoan *fale* corresponds to the representations of exotic primitiveness in the media. That the *fale* shares tectonic similarities with the CargoLifter hangar would be recognised by only a few, architects and *tufuga fau fale* among them. Obvious differences in size and technology effect a decisive division between them. The hangar, high enough to accommodate the Statue of Liberty, has been described as the "world's largest self-supporting hall, a giant palace of glass" (Eames, 2006, May 21). The *fale* operates on such a different scale, and is built of such different materials, that tectonic affinities are immediately overshadowed. Like the other "indigenous" buildings, the *fale* is an artefact on display, rather than a site or architectural location. W.J.T. Mitchell (1986: 56-8) provides a concise overview of Charles S. Peirce's classes of signs: "... the world of signs is fully described by the trio of icon, symbol, and index – signs, that is, by resemblance or analogy, by convention (words and arbitrary signs), and by "causal" or "existential" connection (a trace that signals its cause; a pointing finger)" (56). The icon, as compared to the symbol, stresses a necessary connection with an original through similarity. In this context, it is important that the sign correspond to an average visitor's cognitive representations (Eco, 2000: 360), or clichés. Albert Wendt (quoted in Chi, 1997: 173) wrote that Western clichés about Samoa are "more revealing of *papalagi* fantasies and hang-ups, dreams and nightmares, prejudices and ways of viewing our crippled cosmos, than of our actual islands". That may be so – however, in the leisure industries they can produce performances that in turn affect Indigenous identities.

<sup>24</sup> T.W. Mitchell remarks about the situation of Egyptian scholars visiting the Paris World Exposition in 1869, "the degradation they were made to suffer seemed as necessary to these spectacles as the scaffolded facades or the curious crowds of onlookers. The facades, the onlookers, and the degradation seemed all to belong to the organizing of an exhibit, to a particularly European concern with rendering the world up to be viewed (T. Mitchell, 2002: 497).

<sup>25</sup> "At the beginning there was void, infinity and the primordial creator Tagaloa who lived over the water's unfathomable expanse" (Tropical Island Management GmbH, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Wendt "condemns *papalagi* architecture as epitomized by "the super-stainless/super-plastic/super-hygienic/super-soulless structure very similar to modern hospitals, and its most nightmarish form is the new type tourist hotel-a multi-storied edifice of concrete/steel/chromium/and airconditioning" (74).

<sup>27</sup> "Spatial Exposition of Samoan Architecture", AUT University.

<sup>28</sup> In a second interview in 2009, Sala Pio Tagiilima expressed disappointment about the way things at *Tropical Islands Resort* had developed since 2005. "I have that sense of ownership. If I see things that are not being done well, especially with the Samoan *fale*, then I will feel very sad and sometimes hurt." He considered the use of the *fale* as a smoking lounge "an insult" but was still willing to consult with the management about better ways of using it in a context appropriate to *fa'a Samoa*.