

Of Slumbering, Patient Objects Awaiting our Arrival (Or Maybe Return)

Christine Winter

Affiliate & Adjunct Professor, Flinders University of South Australia, and the University of Sydney, Australia.

Abstract: In the afterword to the collection Christine Winter contextualises collecting and museum collections within wider histories that explore the impact of Sāmoa and the Pacific on German speaking lands and Germany during the nineteenth century. She links theories of the Global South and South-North relationships with ethical considerations for museums today: holding Pacific collections these institutions are to be spaces that welcome Sāmoans and benefit from enduring relationships.

[19th century colonialism; theories of the Global South; ethical museum practises]

Schläft ein Lied in allen Dingen die da träumen fort und fort,
und die Welt hebt an zu singen, triffst du nur das Zauberwort

A song slumbers in all things that are dreaming on and on,
and the world begins to sing, if you meet the magic word.

(Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, - 1835)

It is my honour, as a German scholar and historian of Pacific-German connections, to send the collection of insights, thoughts and hopes edited by Safua Akeli Amaama and Philipp Schorch onwards and to wish it well.¹ For a conclusion would mark the essays as finished, as artifacts of scholarly accomplishments, published and bounded. Instead, this is an invitation to engage with innovative curatorial practices that connect and invigorate museum collections, and celebrate enduring Sāmoanness that is strong at home and remains so throughout many mobilities.

In his novel *Der Nachsommer*, Adalbert Stifter (1857), a Bohemian-Austrian writer of the nineteenth century, created a house full of precious objects surrounded by a carefully nurtured garden that the hero of the novel visits time and again while growing up. And as he grows, the objects await his slowly growing recognition of them. They shape his character, bit by bit, and his sense of himself and being in the world.

¹ I wrote this afterword on the unceded lands of the Kaurna people in Adelaide, Australia. It is dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues who welcomed me in Australia, especially the late Theo Saunders, Mathilda House, Kerry Arabena and Valerie Cooms.

It is by good fortune that, during a crucial period in the development of a modern sense of Germanness, German-speaking lands and later the German nation became connected to Sāmoa and the wider Pacific. And maybe decolonization is the recognition of this good fortune. Chunjie Zhang (2017), in her monograph *Transculturality and the German Discourse in the Age of European Colonialism*, traced the impact of Pacific voyages on a Germany that was coming late to nationhood, and late into formal colonialism, compared to some of its European neighbours. Germanness has been entangled with Southern Voices and experiences, though Germans were at times unable or reluctant to recognize this gift and debt.² Objects in museum collections are just one layer of the flotsam and jetsam of the Pacific that reached its shores.³ Encounters with Sāmoa, Sāmoans and Sāmoanness enriched Germans, even though they were for a long time conducted with a growing sense of European superiority and colonialism, and with developing notions of modernity, race, science and otherness. The articles in this collection take into account that curatorial practices and museum cultures cannot erase this past of the formal colonial German empire and informal German colonialism that preceded and succeeded it. But, the articles suggest how power imbalances can be changed and respectful meetings can take place. And maybe Sāmoanness could do even more than inform culturally appropriate exhibitions, and for example, assist – again – a people to see that it has been connected beyond itself, and to group around a centred openness in its journey. Listening, negotiating, taking time to reach consensus and understanding will necessitate changes to a fast-paced development of exhibitions, which have to keep to deadlines and, once in place, cannot easily accommodate alterations. Whether new media and technology in the digital realm might facilitate such decolonizing practices more readily is still to be seen. But the examples recounted in this collection give rise to hope.

By invoking Epli Hau'ofa in the introduction, the editors make it clear that the Sāmoanness explicated in this collection is not a naïve celebration in which a nostalgic turn toward the past or an unchanging essence masks a capitulation to forge a future. An enduring Sāmoanness anchored in places and objects and in the meetings of people seeks a strong home and embraces mobility. It still faces today, as Hau'ofa argued three decades ago, a multitude of political divisions, neo-colonial challenges, and scholarly distortions. Climate change threatens unforeseeable and irreversible changes to Sāmoa, the Pacific and our world as a whole. Sāmoanness, as set out in these articles, is explicated as a way to live and connect in place, around cultural ways and grounded by spirituality. Maybe you, the reader senses here that I am German, using the word *grounded*. It is a translation of the spiritual depth that my understanding produced. For

2 For the theory of Southern Voices and the Global South, see the work of Raewyn Connell (especially Connell 2007) and Warwick Anderson (especially Anderson 2003). See also Christine Winter (2019).

3 In addition to the references in this collection, see also the work of Iain McCalman on the impact of European voyages to the Pacific on Britain and Europe. For theories of the ethics of entangled and shared histories, I am indebted to Greg Dening (see, for example, Dening 2004).

the articles do not. The authors instead invoke images of weaving, orientation, porous realms and openness that lie at the core of a circle where people meet. Manifestations explicated are the complexities of the *fale* and the richness of the *measina*. Relationships have pre-given structures into which Sāmoans, at home or in the diaspora, grow. It seems here is another good fortune in that objects and impacts less visible to trace await Sāmoans along life-journeys of mobility.⁴ In places such as Bremen and Munich, treasures and histories offer sites to connect with and call Sāmoanness forth. I consider the movement of objects into the colonial metropolises here as an extension of an invitation to engage, visit and be at home. It would be naïve to not recognize that some of this collecting and keeping was and is accompanied by a depletion at the place of origin, Sāmoa. The edited collection takes this into account in calls for repatriation in many forms: actual and digitized objects, and connected information and knowledges. This includes exchanges of curators and the prioritising of Sāmoan perspectives and insights. For, as one example explains, how embarrassing is it to place a house the wrong way round in a public exhibition, and yet how easy is it to avoid this.

Though cautious of metaphors, I am breaking my long-held writing habit in response to the articles edited by Safua Akeli Amaama and Philipp Schorch: may this collection, I hope, contribute to the building of a strong *fale* where we can meet and engage with the richness of *measina*, that, I wish, we will all treasure.

⁴ For the insight of objects removed from islands awaiting and welcoming islanders I am indebted to Katerina Teaiwa (Teaiwa 2015).

Glossary of Terms

fale (house)

measina (treasures)

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