

From Voyager to Swimmer: Transboundary Intersections influencing the History of Competitive Swimming in Samoa

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Abstract

Presently Samoa is a rising sporting nation with intentions of developing competitive swimmers though there is continued frustration of low membership. This paper addresses how the present situation is the result of a whole history, legacy and genealogy that has shaped competitive swimming in Samoa. Historical sources mention Polynesians and Samoans as highly skilled in swimming, however they did not enter the competitive swimming fraternity until the early 2000s, albeit 100 years after Great Britain introduced codes for competitive swimming. While Samoa has a deep cultural relationship with the sea, there remains a disconnect between the documented fluency with swimming and the codified sport of competitive swimming. As what seems a simple argument, that swimming activities in Samoa were functional and not for competitive sport, invariably reveals a complex and nuanced relationship filled with undercurrents of colonisation, racism, and classism and perpetuated myths. In the absence of a singular answer, this historical account lends insight to the critical junctures that intersect over the past two centuries giving shape to competitive swimming in Samoa. In this paper, I investigate the presence of swimming in the history of the islands, the external influences that introduced competitive swimming and where it has evolved to today.

Keywords: Swimming, History, Polynesian, Colonisation, Influences

Background

While there has been a recent groundswell of sport policies and education policies addressing swimming both for educational development and high-performance programmes by the Samoan Government, there remains a paucity of research to effectively respond to these endorsed policies. Competitive swimming in Samoa officially started in 2003 and has recently achieved podium success on the international stage, but participation rates remain low for this relatively new sport. The small membership of swimmers, coaches and swim clubs on the island do not fulfil present-day Government expectations. Our knowledge base of the sport is rooted in contemporary times; therefore, it is helpful to understand Samoa's own history with swimming in order to address the larger research question of why competitive swimming has not become a sport with many participants.

This paper aims to focus, predominantly, on the development of swimming within Samoa and beyond its shores both regionally and internationally for insight into historical elements which led to Samoa's slow development of competitive swimming. Codified competitive swimming was established in 1874 by Britain (Hayes: 2002), but Samoa did not begin competitive swimming until 2003. The neighbouring Fiji Islands had records of competitive swimming since 1963 (Masters: 1978) when competitive swimming came to the region. It is prudent to investigate what other contentious factors occurred in Samoa that may have contributed to the sport being a newcomer to the competitive sports fraternity in Samoa.

In Samoa's idyllic island environment, it is assumed that Samoans are strong and keen swimmers. This myth has been perpetuated throughout time, but socio-political history may tell a different story. A story may have originally begun with the sea and its people but was intruded upon with European occupation, colonisation, Christianity and urbanisation. Samoa's historical priority of sovereignty, cultural preservation and autonomy created a climate that did not foster a logical relationship with this particular modern, codified competitive sport. Samoa may be an ideal setting for swimming, but its legacy of relationship with the sea, relationship with their water sources and engagement with swimming may not have been the necessary backdrop needed to encourage the codified sport of swimming to emerge as it has in many other countries. Canvassing Samoa's history and landscape is critical as "no fully formed debate on sport can take place without reference to the historical dimension (Vamprey: 2015). As the past of swimming shapes the contemporary context of swimming, the story of Samoa and swimming needs to claim a veritable anchor in its rich history.

(Chaline 2017) and (Colwin 1992, 2002) have written the most comprehensive academic accounts of swimming evolution. Other researchers have tackled the swimming histories of Africa (Dawson 2010), Britain (Holt 1990; Parker 2001, 2003; Love 2013; Cock 2012), Indigenous communities (Osmond 2015, 2017; Stronach et al. 2019), U.S. immigrant societies (Norwood 2010; Ross et al. 2014) and New Zealand (Moran 2007; Moran and Wilcox 2013). However, there are only cursory glances at swimming in Polynesia cited within their work. While this reinforces the perception that there is "no line of ancestry" of swimming (Colwin 2002: 12), it also reveals the shortfall within the existing body of literature and the need for research to address Samoa's history with competitive swimming. I argue that although early accounts, social memories and recordings indicate that Samoans were fluent swimmers, in the broadest sense of the term, missionary influence, European occupation and local politics contributed to the latent arrival of competitive swimming in Samoa.

This paper is a socio-cultural history of swimming in Samoa using a reconstructionist/constructionist historical design (Booth 2007) coupled with a cultural studies theoretical approach. Cultural studies intertwines history, cultural expression and power (Nathan: 2015). The method of historical research used both primary and secondary resources. As the 2020 floods destroyed the historical records of Samoa swimming, reliance on oral history through stakeholder interviews, personal accounts and memories of the author comprised most of the contemporary section. Secondary resources included scholarly articles, books, manuscripts, and media that shaped the historical section. This paper attempts to analyse the shifting perceptions, political interplays and power dynamics within the diffusion of codified swimming in a cross-cultural and cross-national context.

Samoa: The Gods, the Sea and the Voyagers

Long before the first explorers came to Samoa in the late 1700s, Samoans anchored their worldview through myths, legends, genealogy and proverbs. Samoa was first settled at least 3,000 years ago (Green 1969; Green and Davidson 1974; Davidson, 1969, 1977), and significant legends have water, the ocean and swimming central to the islands' birth. In Samoan mythology, Tagaloa, the supreme god of ancient times, sighted the earth as "one expanse of water", and "his spirit moved upon the waters" (Nelson and

Anderson 1925: 127) before causing the sea to give birth rocks, then land and living creatures (Meleisea et al. 1987: 2-3).

Water was the primary source of creation, and many legends were placed within this environment to explain migration, significance, warfare and marriage (Nelson and Anderson 1925). While there are many myths and legends referencing swimming in the folklore, it remains part of the oral history of Samoa and other regions of Polynesia to give shape to its history, the genealogies and how ancestors voyaged from one archipelago to another. It also provides meaning and grounding to explain gods, natural phenomena and cultural practices in the Polynesian worldview.

Chaline (2017) claims that aquatic history has shaped human physical development and, consequently, people's cultures. Revered Pacific academic and political activist Teresia Teaiwa, who wrote "We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood" (Teaiwa 2017: 133), profoundly encapsulates that the ocean is the essence of Pacific Islanders. The sea is significant to the people of Samoa as it served as a transboundary and dynamic resource, placing the very people within its fold. The first writings from explorers, missionaries and settlers recorded their observations of the people in the islands and rendered a portrait of people fluent with their ocean home. Reference to long-distance swimming and playing in the surf (Ella 1897: 153), "swimming like a fish" in Fiji (Wetherell 2002: 81), 'natural' swimmers and watermen (Osmond and Phillips 2004) actively swimming and surfing (Osmond and Phillips 2004), and being inherently natural at swimming in Papua New Guinea (Stallman et al. 2008: 372) paints an oceanic landscape of islanders swimming within the waters. Reactions and observations by Westerners included "wonderment to Polynesians capabilities of swimming" (Oliver 2002: 54), who spent much of their days in the water, which contributed to their remarkable aquatic abilities (Oliver 2002). The aquatic environment was an imperishable presence for Samoans as it was their home and permeated both past and present.

Before Samoa's collision with European settlement and colonisation in the mid-1800s, pioneering missionaries who lived in Samoa provided some of the first recordings of the Samoan's way of life at the time. Reverend Stair, a missionary from 1838-1845, made precise references to Samoan's ability, natural ease and affinity with swimming in the warm waters of Samoa. He wrote that "at that time Christianity had not exerted much influence on Samoans" (Stair 1897: 9-10), observing that Samoans are at 'ease in the heavy seas', 'leap from canoe to sea without concern', and were "swimming of great distances" when outrigger canoes break. "Samoans are expert swimmers, being almost at home in the water as on land. It is interesting to watch the ease of their movements and their coolness under circumstances that would sorely perplex a European". He emphasised the fluid relationship Samoans had with their physical environment, mentioning them "swimming for several miles holding onto their canoe" (Stair 1897: 64-65). He also recorded their ability to dive great depths and remain submerged for significant periods; that a Samoan dove "over 30 fathoms" to fasten a rope to an anchor a length that is equivalent to 54 meters. His account offers rich evidence that Samoans had strong swimming skills then with their close relationships with the ocean, rivers and freshwater pools. Gill (1876) had similar accounts of "South-Sea Islanders" during his 22-year sojourn as a missionary.

“Supreme delight of islanders is surf-swimming” (Gill, 1876: 65). He observed that both men and women were expert swimmers and divers, swimming mainly with their feet and having duration to float (Gill 1876: 66).

While Stair's and Gill's accounts lend insight to the daily activities of local Samoans, it is one perspective written at a time of "exoticness and fascination" (Stieglitz 2013: 28) as “Europeans have long romanticised Polynesians (Kabutaulaka 2015: 200) that may have influenced the scale of imaginative observational writing of missionaries. However, recreational play within the ocean, rivers and pools was kept within the shallows with very few Samoans would venture into deep water without holding onto a canoe for support. Other naturalising narratives by Europeans within the Pacific eliciting stereotypes are Hawaiians as amphibious beings (D'Arcy 2006); Maori savagery and physicality (Hokowhitu 2003); and Fijian indigenous masculinity (Molnar and Kanemasu 2014). Though outsiders observed the physicality of these cultural groups, the uniqueness and differences were emphasised, thus rendering a skewed perception of Pacific people.

Colonising through Sports- Missionaries, Germany and New Zealand

By 1820, Samoa's way of life was changing with the steady arrival of missionaries, traders and settlers. Meleisea (1987) describes how foreign occupation accelerated Samoa's path towards colonisation when American, British and German interests grew in Samoa before 1889, leading eventually to the partition of the Samoa archipelago between Germany and the USA in 1900. In 1914 with the onset of the First World War, New Zealand took possession of German Samoa until 1961. Since European contact from the mid-1800s until the mid-1900s, dual agencies of colonisation and missionary agendas shaped Samoa's landscape.

The first arrivals of Missionaries in Samoa from the 1830s throughout the nineteenth century changed Samoan behaviours, including swimming. Chaline (2017: 63) proposes that "the link that water had endured over many millennia was severed by the Judaeo-Christian religion, which emerged in a terrestrial setting that was completely divorced from the aquatic environment". The churches discouraged swimming as it perpetuated immorality through semi-nudity and "transformed attitudes to the body" (Chaline 2017: 99). The church promoted modest dress codes as part of their means to convert their disciples (Jenkins 1990). This likely slowed swimming development during this impressionable time between 1830 and 1962 as the Christian compass pointed to Western manners, modesty and puritan values. The Christian doctrine impacted Sunday activities like swimming, or playing in the water, was prohibited on Sundays, and the new modesty norm made it less likely that people would engage in the water. Dunlap (1951) original research on recreation in Samoan culture reaffirmed that missionaries "frowned upon bathing and swimming on Sunday because these activities took too much time away from religious duties" (Dunlap 1951: 305). However, McKay (1968) personal story of the Samoan islands in *Samoana* recorded his own inability to observe the Sabbath by racing his canoe (*paopao*). The response from local Samoans in his error was, "It does not matter, the missionaries brought Sabbath observance here, and they feel more strongly about it than we do" (McKay 1968: 71). While Christian structure and rules diffused into the Samoan culture, it did not erase recreation activities though it did curtail them.

While missionaries established the first formal schools to enculture Samoans, colonisers used sports as a tool to socialise. Although Chaline's (2017) suggestion that religion severed the natural relationship with humans and water, Samoans continued to engage in the water through recreation, play, travel or fishing. Modern sport was introduced by Western agents such as missionaries, settlers and colonial administrators who used codified sport as a function of European colonisation (Khoo et al. 2014). Likened to Dunlap's (1951) findings, colonial powers viewed the indigenous sporting cultures as 'peripheral' merely providing 'entertainment and recreation' (Chatziefstathiou 2008: 39). Thus said, indigenous sports and activities became marginalised in favour of sports like rugby, cricket, tennis, lawn bowling, netball, croquet, horse racing, boxing and shooting (Rasmussen and Fuamatu 2012). However, most of these introduced sports were offered in the urban areas, while village sports and activities remained unchanged until recent times. King (2009) claims that gradual embodiment of the European culture through European sports pursuits was used to civilise and socialise 'savage' cultures. Samoans' predilection for land-based combat sports encouraged the adoption of Western sports such as rugby.

Sacks (2019) extensive research on sport, namely cricket, and imperialism in Samoa during this time, notes that "Germans did not invest in modern sport as much as the British or Americans as he concluded that Germans were suspicious of modern sports in the context of the broader competition between Germany and Great Britain (...) and that Samoan sports and games were to be in line with their vision for Samoa" (Sacks 2019: 98). Szymanski (2015) offers another argument regarding Germany's relationship with sport in that Germany's focus was military-based as opposed to modern sport-based. When the New Zealand administration took over in 1914, the ideology to advance the political, economic, social and educational systems in Samoa was on the agenda. A more formalised rugby was introduced at this time of occupation in 1920. Although missionaries had introduced the game in the late 1800s, in 1920, "due to the arrival of increased New Zealanders" (Rasmussen and Fuamatu 2012), rugby propelled in popularity. Other sports such as horse racing, golf, tennis and netball were introduced during New Zealand's administration. Competitive swimming was not imported with the influx of New Zealand expatriates even though competitive swimming was developing at pace in New Zealand at this time (Moran 2010).

England: the Pioneers, Powers and Appropriation of Competitive Swimming

Concomitantly when local European traders and missionaries settled in Samoa, England established the first competitive swimming organisation in 1837. Initially named the National Swimming Federation of Great Britain, the federation was rebranded as the Amateur Swimming Association in 1886. The established code already signals structural parity from the onset. Renaming swimming as 'amateur' emphasised the ideal of competitive swimming as an upper-class sport, engaged in by those who did not need to work for a living. Lowerson (1993) explains that 'amateur' was used in conjunction with 'gentleman' and seen as a code of ethics barring competition for "pecuniary gain" (Lowerson 1993: 169). This distinction ensured that the sport was a gentleman's sport, not marred by gambling, and had strict membership codes. The emerging middle class in Great Britain gained membership into the competitive society by claiming higher moral standards coupled with their burgeoning disposable income (Holt 1990: 130).

When Britain established competitive swimming, preferred swimming strokes were confirmed. From the onset, the original code declared face-out-of-water breaststroke to be the accepted competitive stroke. The English continued their stance, commenting that over-arm propulsion, as they had seen in native Americans, Africans and Pacific Islanders, produced a thrashing and disruption of the water, crude and elementary (Colwin 2002; Stronach et al. 2019; Dawson 2006, 2010). Dawson's (2006, 2010) robust archival research on African swim styles revealed that the over-arm propulsion did not fit with the code of a gentleman's sport as breaststroke was "refined and graceful" while overarm stroke was "unusual in the polished world" (Dawson 2010: 90). Colwin (2002) and Stieglitz (2013) also argue that many indigenous communities used more advanced, propulsive strokes than the western culture. Osmond and Phillips (2004) challenge the European discourse that although islanders swam mainly due to lifestyle, competitive swimming remained a euro-centric sport.

In the sport's infancy, England was purposeful in controlling the development of the sport, although indigenous peoples in many British colonies had developed more speed and power in the stroke and were better at swimming (Colwin 2002). In this period, competitive swimming grew in Australia in 1846, the USA in 1877, Germany in 1882, Hungary in 1896 and France in 1899 (Colwin 2002). By the time competitive swimming made it into the modern Olympics, the front crawl was the accepted practice for speed swimming. The once criticised over-arm and bilateral kicking approach as uncivilised was now an accepted stroke. Consequently, Osmond and Phillip's (2004) research on Solomon Islander Alick Wickham's swimming style as "crawling over the water" raised issues of appropriation. Wickham's crawl was claimed as the "Australian crawl" (Osmond and Phillip 2004; Osmond 2015), although this over-arm speed style had been used by Pacific Islanders for "more than one thousand years" (Colwin 2002: 4). Indigenous athletes from the Pacific, such as Alick Wickham of the Solomon Islands and Duke Kahanamoku, a renowned Hawaiian surfer and U.S. Olympic swimmer, all used a speed-based crawl swimming well before codified competitive swimming took it as their own (Osmond, 2006. 2011. 2015). Appropriation was not an uncommon trait of imperialism. Observations of indigenous propulsive swim strokes were seen and reappropriated, as in the case of Wickham (Osmond, 2011. 2015) and Dawson's critical research on the history of African swimming (Dawson, 2006. 2010).

Polynesians Swimming- stereotypes and racism

During the 19th century, Europe drove sport into the world (Besnier and Brownwell 2012), and the USA became a major competitor in all sports, including competitive swimming. The 1912 Olympics heralded an opportunity for the United States to showcase their talents. They fielded a strong team with Polynesian athletes in swimming with notable native Hawaiians, such as Duke Kahanamoku, Pua Kealoha, and Warren Kealoha, headlining as Olympic swimming champions in 1912, 1920 and 1924. Kahanamoku's given name became a household moniker as 'The Duke' for his swimming accomplishments and his world-renowned surfing career, which continued long after his Olympic years through surfing and swimming promotions on the West coast of the USA. The Hawaiian-Americans' swimming success permitted them into the exclusive gentlemen's society and, despite the racism of those times, "allowed Kahanamoku, who was a U.S.

Hawaiian 1912 Olympic swimming Gold Medallist, entry to society through the avenue of sport" (Nendel 2009: 130). However, Yakovee's (2007:28) research revealed that inherent racism in the sport was already rooted in competitive swimming. His research disclosed accounts of the Duke "shattering the 100-yard world record," which prompted the Amateur Athletic Union to question whether "Hawaiian timers used alarm clocks instead of stopwatches". This paternalistic reference explicitly indicates that the mainland association held the belief that the Hawaiians could not organise competitive swimming. DePond (2019) attests that the Duke's swimming and surfing success offset his racial discrimination as the austere image of codified swimming maintained its status as a 'true' sport. Those who performed within the sports code carried middle-class attitudes and had undefeatable performances gained acceptance into this exclusive amateur society (DePond 2019).

According to Chatziefstathiou (2008), during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there were expositions to display the exoticness of others who were predominantly from the East with foreign cultures. However, some displays were intentionally showcasing 'pre-modern, or even 'uncivilised' and 'savage' (Chatziefstathiou 2008: 29). Osmond (2011) analyses the racial stereotypes of Pacific Islanders, claiming that their remnant strands within history and colonial ideologies have perpetuated the myths about Pacific islander's abilities, like the Duke has "romanticised, racialised and naturalised his abilities (Osmond, 2011: 275). DePond (2019), Yakovee (2007), Smith (1995) and Osmond (2011) argue that sports myths and stories have reinforced a perception that may only apply to a few but have had far-reaching race-based expectations.

The concept of others and the Us being Europeans was coupled with the diffusion of modern sport from the West to the East. According to Chatziefstathiou (2008), "the social structures of imperialism that defined colonial relationships produced powerful images of Others and allowed the idea of Europe to emerge" (Chatziefstathiou 2008: 30). The portrayal of these renowned Polynesian athletes in the media mirrors Reverend Stair's observations almost a century before, assuming that the native Hawaiian athletes were "naturally good at certain activities such as swimming and surfing" (DePond 2019: 69). The Polynesian athletes had "paddle-like appendages", "natural inclination to the water", and "a wonderful perfection of the stroke" (DePond 2019: 69). The racist stereotype discounted the environment in which swimming and surfing was learned and continued to magnify Pacific islanders as 'naturally' adept at swimming and could easily transfer these skills into competitive swimming. Osmond (2015) summarises the centrality of competitive swimming strokes, which was once inherent in the Pacific islands. "By 1930, the West had long since appropriated and refined various swimming strokes practised by Indigenous people" (Osmond, 2015: 18). While once seen as "transnational bodies of motion in the Pacific (...) crossing borders" (Stieglitz 2013), the correlation between Pacific Islanders and swimming had "diminished" and "the notion of unique aquatic prowess had waned considerably" (Osmond, 2015: 18) after this time.

The Arrival of Competitive Swimming to the Pacific Islands

1963 marked when Pacific Islanders began to intersect with competitive swimming at the inaugural 1963 South Pacific Games. The South Pacific Commission, an institution founded by the colonial powers of the Pacific after the Second World War, created the South Pacific Games (SPG) in 1961. Masters (1978) described how the Pacific Games Council designed the games to "create bonds" and "form friendships and brotherhood" in sporting exchanges beyond "race, religion or politics" (Pacific Games Council n.d). The games had a "measure of paternalism with their establishment in keeping with the essentially colonial nature of Pacific History" (Masters 1978: 162). These "South Seas Olympics" (Masters 1978: 162) aimed to promote and develop sports for the Pacific nations and the people. The inaugural games were awarded to Fiji, a strongly linked British colony and the only Pacific island to have participated in the British Empire Games. The Pacific Games had an inherent ideology to reflect Olympic values. While the documents gathered indicate a well-meaning intention to establish the Games, this was a historical shift from localised games and pastimes to the structured, coded sport. As only rugby and cricket had evolved within the region, the western sporting model was seen as "the only efficient system that with its rules and regulations could lead to competitive sport performances" (Chatziefstathiou 2008: 39). Founder of the Olympic Movement Baron Pierre de Coubertin expressed that to receive "the benefits of 'sport civilisation', it is imperative that we allow them to belong to the vast sport system, which entails rules and regulations and competitive sports results performances, which form the basis of this civilisation" (Coubertin 1931a: in Chatziefstathiou 2008: 39). Contrary to the premise of promoting friendly competition between the island nations, most competing nations at the 1963 SPG used the British or French flags and anthems, while Samoa was the only independent country at the time competing under its own flag and anthem (Rasmussen and Fuamatu 2012).

The Pacific Games Council website is an extensive source of information that has been meticulously curated and hosts keeping in council documents, records, and has played a key part in developing a historical overview which is presented here: "*South Pacific Games 1963 - Fiji*". (2010). For the inaugural games in 1963, the British administration in Fiji invested heavily in refurbishing the Suva Sea Baths and renaming it the Suva Olympic pool. This Olympic-sized pool was built in 1925 as a bathing facility following the popular trend of leisure bathing pools in Great Britain. However, the pool's history is marred with segregation requiring separate pools for indigenous people and expatriates. It was not until 1954 that the pools became public and desegregated (Suva Olympic Pool n.d.). With its facility upgrade for the 1963 games, the pool became the first-ever Olympic pool for the Oceania region. Although fourteen countries and territories attended this multi-sport event, only four competed in swimming. Fiji stood to win the most swimming medals in this first competition, with only New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and American Samoa participating. Expatriate swimmers dominated the events and gained the most medals, such as Fiji's Carl Bay, who was an expatriate child of the Director of Education in Fiji. A native of New Zealand and schooled in Whangarei, Bay took out five aquatic gold medals (Masters: 1978). Using expatriates to represent the islands were supported in Masters' (1978) claims that "water is not a competitive medium for the indigenous peoples of the Pacific, with a lack of public pools, and the modesty of their women, all being factors in this situation" (Masters 1978: 164).

Swimming faced issues of culture, overseas representation, and lack of facilities factor highly into the low popularity of competitive swimming amongst indigenous people (Masters 1978). Those present at the 1963 games observed that most islander competitors had no formal swimming experience, swam in rivers or even not at all. A 1963 post-games media article was the first of many to query the lack of swimming talent in the islands (Pacific Islands Monthly 1963). The article debunked the stereotype that had been believed for over a century. Pacific Islanders, once portrayed as naturally skilled in swimming, had failed to perform as expected. The article quoted a swim official saying, "you'd hardly believe that an area that invented the style (crawl stroke), that is now the basis of world swimming could have slipped so far behind in the sport". The first SPG swimming competition did not impress due to the low turnout, their young age, their incorrect strokes and their inability to complete the distance required (Pacific Islands Monthly 1963: 161). The post-games article claimed that 'competitive swimming was a foreign concept' and swimming was merely for 'fun'. It highlighted that women had less experience as they were 'coy and were unwilling to uncover themselves in the presence of men' and that many islands did not have modern swimming pools. The games overturned the romantic belief that Pacific Islanders were 'naturally' skilled, speed swimmers echoing Osmond (2015) claim that the aquatic capabilities of Pacific islanders had now declined. The nineteenth British coded and rule-based sports culture had reproduced around the world through the colonies, like Fiji, with overtones of classism, sexism and racism (Chatziefstathiou, 2008).

During the next four years, New Caledonia, a French territory in the Pacific, took to the helm when awarded the 1967 games hosting rights. According to Chatziefstathiou (2008), "France also used sport as part of its imperialistic practices to assimilate the local population into the citizenship of the motherland" (p 23). Darby (2001) argues that France used modern-day sport within the indigenous populations "to compete as 'French', maximising the potential for acquiring national cohesion (Chatziefstathiou, 2008: 23). This 'Metropolitan French' mirrored British imperial paternalism within the colonised Pacific Islands. Likened to France and Great Britain conflicts, French New Caledonia was not to be outdone by British Fiji, rendering an image of their ongoing rivalry played out through Pacific Islanders. New Caledonia, which has a large non-indigenous population, unlike other Pacific Island countries, spared no cost and built modern-day infrastructures funded by France and focussed on using proven coaching programmes and swimming systems to support their imported athletes to ensure victory at the next South Pacific Games (Pacific Games Council n.d). As the 1963 games promoted friendship and regionalism, 1967 was an aggressive competition as New Caledonia pushed the concept of required professionalism and uniformity to be considered competitive. Tensions around competing on Sunday and language barriers permeated throughout the games. Protests to keep the Sabbath sacred and not competing on Sunday fell on deaf ears by the French organisers (Pacific Games Council n.d).

Many of the expatriate swimmers who qualified for the minimum residency requirements in Island countries dominated the medal tally in the first Pacific Games; they originally hailed from New Zealand, the United States, Australia and France (Masters 1978). This contributed to the growing chasm between expatriate and indigenous swimming performances, with island swimmers trailing behind expatriates consequently absent from the SPG records. Notable expatriate swimmers hailed from British and French colonies.

Fiji's Carl Bay, who competed in the 1963 games, won Gold medals in 5 events and held these records over thirty years (Masters 1978; *Athlete Historical Snapshot* 2009), and New Caledonia's Marie-Jose Kersaudy, a French National, dominated women's swimming events from 1963 - 1971 (Oceania Swimming Association n.d.). Master's (1978) describes that importing offshore talent for the games was an acceptable practice as the lack of facilities and training programmes hampered the development of local athletes and their participation. Smaller countries lobbied for stricter athlete residency requirements, but Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, New Caledonia and Fiji did not support the changes as they had large expatriate communities at that time.

Tahiti, New Caledonia, Fiji and Papua New Guinea remained the usual winners and rotated the hosting rights every four years, filling their teams with overseas and locally trained swimmers. The link between built swimming pools and swimming performance had taken root throughout the region. Sakovich's (2013) historical report on swimming in the Pacific islands emphasised a timeline of constructed swimming pools concurrent with the development of swim clubs within each island. In Tahiti, New Caledonia and Fiji, whose infrastructure was at the time financed and driven by their colonial administrators, countries with military links, such as Papua New Guinea, also had proven success in competitive swimming. Papua New Guinea had early success in swimming due to the army barrack's new swimming pool, allowing locally enlisted men to train for the games. Charles Martin, an indigenous Papua New Guinean, earned gold medals in the 1971 and 1975 SPG with a continued career at the Commonwealth Games and Australian competitions, proving the possibility of indigenous success given access to the facilities and opportunities (Pacific Games Council n.d; PNGOlympic.org)

Outside of the stronger sporting Polynesian and Melanesian nations, the Micronesian region drove their competitive swimming programmes by the late 1960s through expatriate coaches. Peace Corps Volunteers, private business merchants and other residents took on the competitive swimming initiatives. Private pools and hotel pools allowed children to join the various clubs in Northern Pacific, such as Saipan in 1967 and Palau and Guam following in the early 1970s. Guam hosted the 1995 SPG boasting an enviable Olympic pool facility, then succumbing to permanent facility closure due to a super typhoon (Sakovich 2013). Palau, trying to keep on course with swim development, managed to build a six-lane 25m freshwater pool for the 1998 Micronesian Games but otherwise used existing lagoons and salt-water tidal pools to run swim development (Sakovich 2013).

Samoa Independence and the Rise of Competitive Sport

Samoa remained at a competitive disadvantage as the sport of swimming continued to develop in the region. Samoa participated in the 1963 SPG though was absent from the swimming events. According to Rasmussen and Fuamatu (2012), Samoa's participation in the 1963 games fuelled Samoan's to organise and affiliate new sports to the Sports Federation. By the 1970s, more modern sports were introduced by returning overseas students and expatriates though swimming had not been recognised as a competitive sport and still seen as a recreational pastime. The inaugural SPG occurred the year after Samoa's achievement of independence in 1962, the first Pacific island to do so. However, this reclaimed autonomy may have thwarted the predicted pathway towards competitive swim development.

While the other islands invested in swimming pools to promote competitive swimming, Samoa focussed predominately on economic and political development, which took precedence over sports infrastructure. In addition to the development of public pools, other countries began investing in tourism campaigns which included catering to the significant number of expatriates with hotels, swimming pools, and available European swimming attire. Until the 1990s, Samoa had very few hotels and far fewer swimming pools. No bathing attire was available at the small retailers and shops in Apia, as it was not an acceptable norm to wear Western-style swimwear at any of the village-owned beaches. A traditional wrap of material (*lavalava*) or ordinary clothing were usually worn when swimming in the water, signalling the legacy of missionary philosophy of bodily modesty.

The games had already rotated full circle from Fiji in 1963 through the more populated island countries of New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, and Tahiti, only to be hosted again by Fiji in 1979. By 1981, to address equity and hosting rights, the South Pacific Commission introduced the South Pacific Mini Games. These were a less extensive version of the games to host and were offered for the smaller Pacific Island countries who desired to host the games but could not afford the investment of sports infrastructure. The Mini Games did not mandate swimming within the competition schedule, thus sparing host nations the obligations to develop facilities beyond their means. Samoa did not perceive itself as a minor player or mini-game host nation and pursued the goal of hosting the 'major' games.

However, Samoa orchestrated a way to host the games without providing for swimming as the Samoan sports administrators believed their turn was long overdue, especially with continued gold medal successes in weightlifting and boxing. Although the Game Council's charter required host countries to have a swimming pool, Samoa pushed ahead with a forceful bid without the promise of a pool. The delegation spent inordinate time mapping out a solid proposal and great expense flying to Norfolk Island to present their proposal. The Samoan delegates convinced the SPG Council that they were prepared to host the games and proposed excluding swimming. Their invested effort to push for hosting rights without swimming heralded what came decades later.

Historical reference from the SPG Council revealed that the 1983 Games in Samoa certainly provided a first-time opportunity for Samoans to experience and spectate high-level competitive sport and placed Samoa in a competitive regional position. However, competitive swimming was not sufficiently valued to build the infrastructure as other five rival nations had done. According to a past National Olympic Committee President, this "reinforces the general disposition towards competitive swimming at the time" as the National Olympic Committee members countered 'why do we need a pool when we have the sea?' to the South Pacific Games Council pool regulation" (Aumao, T., 31 March 2020). As a reaction, dominant swimming countries later demanded that all subsequent host countries must have the appropriate facilities (Fiji Swimming n.d.) Consequently, it was the first and last hosting bid to win without competitive swimming. The legacies of the 1983 Samoa SPG brought sport development into sharper focus. Rasmussen and Fuamatu (2012) noted that elements of professionalism propelled the growth of the sport, echoing similar beliefs from New Caledonia's approach of professionalism. Focus on international federation membership, national federation restructuring, business management focus and sponsorship schemes (Rasmussen and Fuamatu 2012).

The country continued to compete at the SPG, Oceania and Commonwealth Games and gained Olympic membership. Samoa's first appearance in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics occurred as the National Olympic Committee in Samoa (SASNOC) joined the International Olympic Committee the previous year.

However, as Samoa's rugby success remained the flagship sport to promote the small nation, competitive swimming remained marginal. Likened to Micronesian's approach to swim development, swimming remained unorganised. It was taught by expatriates and volunteers based in Samoa to their local communities merely to share a skill rather than drive a competitive sport. The only Apia swimming pool, owned by a local merchant, was used for student-teacher swimming lessons. Expatriates offered swimming lessons for the Anglican Church boy scouts and the Apia Protestant Brownie troops who used the seafront and Aggie Grey's hotel pool. The pool lessons were infrequent and accessible only through connections at the hotel. This ad hoc delivery of swimming skills continued until the early 2000s.

Samoa, Competitive Swimming and the International Circuit

In the early 1990s, SASNOC realised that international multi-sport competitions would overlook Samoa as a legitimate host nation if they did not provide the required sports facilities, including a pool. By 1995, the Samoa Swimming Association was officially established and joined the National Olympic Committee as the recognised national federation for swimming. By 2003, Samoa was awarded the 2007 Games on the promise of a completed swimming pool.

With ground-breaking effort, the Board of SASNOC and the Swimming Association Board secured land to build the Tuana'imato Sports Complex in an area known as Faleata. It was an underdeveloped area laden with forest, but the sports administrators' idea for the multi-sports complex was given full support by the Prime Minister. With the SASNOC, swim administrators and the government focussing on facility development for the 2007 SPG, there was limited focus on local swimmer development though interested swimmers practised open water training in the sea at Taumeasina, Apia Harbour and Faleasiu with infrequent opportunities to train in the Apia hotel pools.

In 2003, Samoa's first team of competitive swimmers participated at the 2003 SPG in Fiji. Membership in the International Federation of swimming (Fédération Internationale De Natation. (FINA)) afforded Samoa's entrance to swimming at the 2003 FINA World Championships and the continental Oceania Swimming Championships. Swimmers for these international competitions were enlisted talent from offshore locations, keeping local membership at abeyance.

By 2007 Samoa had a swimming centre located in the urban area of Tuana'imato on the outskirts of the capital city of Apia. The Faleata Aquatic Centre was funded and built by China Aid for the 2007 SPG Samoa. The result was an unrivalled aquatic centre outfitted with two Olympic sized pools and a dive well. By 2008, the Swimming Association was re-established as the Samoa Swimming Federation. Initiatives such as school programs, coaching development, and institutional development were prioritised (Punivalu 2012). While growth at the policy, grassroots and administrative level excelled, filling teams with solely local talent fell short, forcing to import overseas-based swimmers to represent the country when Samoa swimming gained entry to the Commonwealth Games team in 2010, 2014 and 2018.

Concurrently, Samoa was able to field teams for the FINA world championships every two years from 2003 onwards. Another significant sports achievement was the first Olympic swimmers joining the Team Samoa campaign for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. With the Federation functioning at total capacity, school swim programs, volunteer enlistment through JICA and Peace Corps, and local coaching training evolved. 2019 recorded the first gold medals for swimming at the 2019 Pacific Games held in Apia. The swimming success at these games allowed this new sport to claim its rightful place as a competitive sport and was welcomed into the sporting fraternity both in Samoa and internationally.

Since 2003, support for competitive swimming development in Samoa has ebbed and flowed, surging at times and distinctly receding at other times. While the ocean is at every islander's doorstep, building swimming pools proved to be a determining factor in developing competitive swimming. Since 2008, there have been ongoing challenges to develop the sport. Due to ongoing refurbishments, maintenance and facility scheduling, the intermittent closures of the aquatic facility have critically impacted programmes, competitions, and training (Punivalu 2012). In order to meet government expectations for podium performances, local swimmers relocated overseas to attend long-term training camps and competitions.

On a regional level, the Pacific Games have undoubtedly been another critical driver for establishing competitive swimming in the region and Samoa. In 2015, the SPG rebranded to become more inclusive as the Pacific Games (PGC n.d.). The justification in the name change was articulated in the Pacific Games Council vision as the name encompassed all the islands, north and south, and provided distance from the paternalistic labelling of "South Seas Olympics" in 1963 (Masters 1978: 162). Although the original plan had inherent "paternalism, hierarchy, conservative and racist discourse in describing the colonial societies" (Said 1993), outcomes of this original plan have rendered national sports heroes, legacies and highly developed sports programmes. The Pacific can rightly reclaim their actual affiliation with the sport of swimming, albeit their reclamation comes decades after the British and other world powers excelled in this very sport.

Conclusion

The global history of competitive swimming is punctuated with elements of class, race, power and religion intertwined with political agendas, global sports schemes and international appeal. Similarly, these external agencies have impacted Samoa's own history with political occupation, missionary influences, national reclamation, economic priorities, and resistance to the sport itself. While Samoa was the first to divorce from European powers, it was one of the last countries in the region to establish competitive swimming. Historically, Samoans tethered their roots to the unencoded natural ocean environment, but the country now boasts an enviable pool facility as the cornerstone for competitive swim development. Both the aquatic centre and 2007 SPG were the primary catalysts to encourage local swimming participation but are underscored with inheritances from past colonialism. As a pattern seen throughout the islands, it remains common practice for competitive swimming to be driven by people outside the margins of Samoa and the islands. Sport in Samoa, including swimming, is a major influencer in nation-building. Knowing the past helps locate Samoa swimming within wider narratives of social, political and cultural life.

Although earlier accounts showed Samoans and Polynesians fluent, fast and unbridled in the water, codified, competitive swimming was a foreign concept. The sport may be seen as alien with paternalistic markings and racial discourse but was inevitably shaped by their own natural abilities and proven legacies in the water. Specifically, Samoa's swimming history has social and cultural elements which inevitably permeated into modern-day sport. Samoans were once seen as strong, confident swimmers, though local, regional and global movements, western impressions, international sport influences and conflicting ideologies contributed to Samoa's reluctant establishment of competitive swimming.

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