

NAVIGATING CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN AMERICAN TERRITORIES: NATIONALISM IN AMERICAN SAMOA AND PUERTO RICO

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the various paths taken by two American territories: American Samoa and Puerto Rico. American Samoans are not citizens of the United States, they are ‘nationals’. Puerto Ricans, on the contrary, are US citizens and have the same rights as any American once they move to the ‘mainland’. Despite this initial difference, there have been few attempts by the government of American Samoa to change or alter the status, and a sense of nationalism is not, at first sight, overly expressed, while in Puerto Rico, five plebiscites on the status question have taken place. The two archipelagos have both been under intense Americanisation and the sense of nationalism in both places is expressed in different ways.

KEYWORDS: American Samoa, Puerto Rico, islandness, nationalism

Introduction

The last two decades have seen the emergence of Island Studies (ie the study of islands on their own terms). Still in development, the field of Island Studies is constantly innovating and questioning theories. To study the specificity of “nations without states” (Guibernau, 2007, 2013) in island settings, a framework for island nationalism has recently been developed (Fazi, 2012; Hepburn 2012, 2010; Lecours and Vézina, 2017) where several interrelated factors (territorial, political, economic, environmental, historical and cultural) intersect. Those factors are further divided into multiple hypotheses, allowing the assessment of the strength of nationalism in a given island. This article examines two specific interrelated variables: territorial factors and political factors and applies them to two American archipelago territories: American Samoa and Puerto Rico. American Samoans are not citizens of the United States, they are ‘nationals’, a status that can only be changed through a naturalisation process that involves residing in the US for at least three months, passing a test in English and civics, and taking an oath of allegiance to the United States. Puerto Ricans, on the contrary, are US citizens and have the same rights as any American once they move to the ‘mainland’. Despite this initial difference, there have been few attempts by the government of American Samoa to change or alter the status and the sense of nationalism is not necessarily expressed at the elite or political level, while in Puerto Rico, the nationalist, and at times overtly sovereigntist movements have a long established history of struggles, so much so that the party politics on the archipelago is divided around the status question. It

should be also noted that five (non-binding) plebiscites on the status question have taken place. Why is that so? Why has the government of American Samoa not sought a change in political status? More precisely, why has there not been a wide-ranging nationalist movement in American Samoa as there has been (and continues to be) in Puerto Rico?

To answer those questions, this article will first review island nationalism, discussing the tensions in the field and drawing on the connection between islandness and nationalism to investigate the two archipelagos. Then, some historical and political contexts of American territories, especially Puerto Rico and American Samoa, will be provided. This will allow for an analysis of the similarities and differences between the two island territories with regard to territorial and political factors. Finally, some concluding remarks will be made as to whether change is possible or even desirable.

Island nationalism: a framework

To study the specificities of island nationalism, scholars of island studies and nationalism studies (such as Baldacchino, 2008; Fazi, 2012; Hepburn, 2012; Prinsen & Blaise, 2017; Vézina, 2018) have developed a framework that allows islandness and nationalism to be studied together and specifically. There are variations among authors as to how to proceed with such studies, and I aim to build on their previous works to address unanswered questions in the field and, more precisely, the questions raised in the introduction. However, to do so, a review of island nationalism seems appropriate.

To conceptualise island nationalism, I have reconciled the concept of islandness with theories of nationalism. In doing so, I endeavour to develop a theoretical framework – namely, island nationalism – that can be generally applied to any island, regardless of whether it is attached to a central state. Islandness is a concept that applies to the distinctive character and features of islands. Islandness is “an intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways” (Baldacchino, 2006: 9). For Philip Conkling, islandness is a phenomenon that researchers and non-islanders try to define, comprehend, and acquire, but that islanders instinctively understand (2007: 191-192). He further adds: “islandness is a deeply held feeling of a sacred connectedness to place that blurs the sense of time... Islandness lives in one's mind and imagination and therefore can be carried within one no matter where one might be” (ibid: 199). The field of Island Studies itself debates over the definition of what is an island, and what is islandness. Often, scholars will point to dichotomies and portray islands as: paradise and prison, openness and closure, roots and routes, materiality and metaphor. Some even go as far as saying that all is islands. Depraetere argues that: “there is no such things as an island, only the metaphorical representations and mental schema” (2008: 3). Although I do not necessarily want to take this ‘extreme’ view, I do want to contribute to the debate outlined by Hay:

In fact, within island studies, the very question of the island as metaphor is problematic. Is ‘islandness’ to do with a generalisable condition of physical isolation or a state of personal disconnection (a robust and tenaciously familiar metaphor and literary trope)? Or is it to do with the stuff of real geographical entities that more or less accord with one of those contested definitions of an island as a physical reality? (2006: 21).

Baldacchino and Clark appropriately point out:

If islandness is a particular state or condition of being, there is a corresponding action in island-ing. We propose island as a verb, islanding as an action. Pacific poet and scholar Teresia Teaiwa asks, and argues: “Shall we make island a verb? As a noun, it’s so vulnerable to impinging forces... let us also make island a verb. It is a way of living that could save our lives.” (2013: 129).

For them, such a verb will avoid putting islands in the dichotomies outlined previously and lead to grasping “the rich weave of relational space and place” (Baldacchino and Clark, 2013: 129). Perhaps the most influential effort at such a reconceptualisation of the political and relational spaces has been Epeli Hau’ofa’s vision of Oceania as a “sea of islands”, emphasising the connecting marine environment and long histories of mobility and settlement as common heritage and resource of Pacific Island societies. In a series of essays, Hau’ofa proposes the ocean itself as a metaphor shaping and mobilising cultural and political identifications within and across national boundaries in the region.

To make islandness a bit more tangible, Eve Hepburn (2010: 10; 2012: 124-125) identifies six dimensions of the concept of islandness: 1) geographical (separation from the mainland), 2) political (expressed through a desire to be self-governing), 3) social (a sense of islander identity), 4) demographic (high rates of emigration), 5) historical (as sites of conquest, assimilation and colonialism), and 6) economic (limited resources, absence of economies of scale and high transportation costs). Similarly, Fazi (2012: 142-149) also enumerates six criteria to explain the various categories involved in studying island autonomy: 1) legal (to what extent historically the state has exercised power on the island), 2) geopolitical (a territorialised party system on the island), 3) historical (history of independence and domination), 4) cultural (mainly around language), 5) geographical (distance between the island and the state) and 6) economic (dependence or independence). Accordingly, islandness seems to play a decisive role in the development and construction of a distinct sense of identity. The geographical condition of islandness (expressed in the geographical criteria of both Fazi and Hepburn), as well as the political criteria, are factors that previous works have deemed of high importance. They help define the basis of the distinctiveness of island settings and can contribute to surges in nationalism. But before discussing island nationalism, it is important to define nationalism. To do so, I will draw upon a constructivist approach *à la* Brubaker and the work of Jaime Llach (2011; 2012) regarding how nationalism can be expressed.

Nationalism, as a concept, has been widely studied. Its relationship with territoriality, and islands in particular, has also led to numerous studies on island states, such as Britain, for example (Colley, 1992; Greenfeld, 1992). Others (Baldacchino, 2004, 2010; Baldacchino & Hepburn, 2012, Prinsen & Blaise, 2017) have studied this phenomenon in relation to non-sovereign island jurisdictions. For Baldacchino, the latter takes the form of island sub-nationalism, which he explains as follows, “the articulation of nationalism (in island settings) is becoming jurisdictional... [m]any island people are comfortable in displaying evidences of sub-nationalism, much like a regional or geographically anchored ethnicity” (2004: 79). Baldacchino’s conceptualisation is useful and, for the purpose of the argument here, will be combined with Roger Brubaker’s ‘practical category’:

Nationalism is not a ‘force’ to be measured as resurgent or receding. It is a heterogeneous set of ‘nation’-oriented idioms, practices, and possibilities that

are continuously available or 'endemic' in modern cultural and political life... My concern... is not with the resurgence but with the reframing of nationalism, not with how much nationalism there is but with what kind, not with the strength but with the characteristic structure and style of nationalist politics (1996: 10).

In other words, Brubaker argues that measuring nationalism is of little intrinsic interest. Instead, we need to understand the form nationalism takes in a certain place and the practices and circumstances (whether political, economic or social) that led to that particular form. That being said, nationalism can vary widely within a nation and a nationalist movement. The work of Jaime Llach on this topic is enlightening. His work is part of a desire to abandon the pre-existing idea that the final goal of any nationalist movement is independence:

Variation in secessionism is also interesting because separatism 'is widely held to be the culmination of national development, the peak manifestation of nationalism, reflecting a nation's collective desire to establish or protect its own state in the international arena, one that is equal or superior in status to all other states...' (Hale, 2003, p. 3). Yet, we find many sub-state nationalists that opt for a variety of non-secessionist orientations (2012: 434).

For Llach, such variation is worthy of study and leads to three main orientations that can lead, or not lead, to sovereignty:

the national movements of "minority nations" are internally differentiated, and the political tendencies (that is, political parties) making up sub-state national movements are subdivided into two or three basic political orientations: pro-independence, pro-autonomy, and, in some cases, pro-federation. Moreover, the internal currents within national movements can vary over time, experiencing moments of foundation, growth, development, and decay (ibid: 204).

As he reminds us elsewhere, these independentists, autonomists, federalists are "competing forms of nationalism: they all agree that the nation exists but they disagree on the degree of sovereignty the nation should seek" (ibid: 435). By keeping in mind this distinction – though there may very well be differences within each of these three groups – working hypotheses can be formulated.

On one hand, this article examines the geographical component of islandness and will attempt to verify, following the work of Fazi (2012), the subsequent hypotheses:

- a) An island that is geographically far from the mainland (see Table 1) or where the central state has limited presence will exhibit a greater sense of nationalism.
- b) An island that is small will exhibit a greater sense of nationalism.

On the other hand, the political criteria of islandness defined by both Fazi (2012) and Hepburn (2010, 2012) are worth verifying as well:

- c) an island that was previously independent will exhibit a greater sense of nationalism;

d) the presence of a territorialised party system is indicative of a stronger sense of nationalism; and

e) various powers are negotiated between the island and the metropole. An island with limited powers will ask for more and exhibit a stronger sense of nationalism.

Distance from the mainland (in km)	Rating (on a scale of 1 to 3)
Less than 300 km	1
Between 300 km and 3000 km	2
More than 3000 km	3

Table 1 – Distance of islands from the mainland and rating (adapted from Fazi, 2012: 149)

In this article, I will examine the territorial dimension (hypotheses a and b) as well as pay particular interest to the relationships that are negotiated (and often imposed by the metropole) between the two territories and the United States (hypothesis e). That being said, both hypotheses c and d will be also be mentioned and explored in order to better grasp the status and relationships between the archipelagos and the metropole.

Differentiated Citizenship and Territorial Status

At the turn of the 20th Century, the US Supreme Court made a series of decisions that are the basis of differentiated citizenship in the US. Those decisions, known as the *Insular Cases*, are still impacting the lives of residents of American territories (Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, American Samoa) in different ways. The *Insular Cases* were central to the development of the American Empire, as they gave answers as to the applicability of the US Constitution to territories acquired after the Spanish-American War. Congress had the power to decide whether residents of “unincorporated” territories would be US citizens, US “nationals,” or something else. In fact, what the *Insular Cases* did is give ultimate power to Congress to implement a system of differentiated citizenship.

One of the legacies of the *Insular Cases* was the establishment of the notion of “unincorporated” territories. This is a legal status generally understood to mean territories for which Congress has not yet anticipated statehood (becoming a fully-fledged member of the US like the other 50 states). An unincorporated territory is one in which “some, but not all of the US constitution applies, that Congress has ultimate oversight and veto power, and that the place is neither on equal terms with the states nor officially on the path to statehood” (Mack, 2017: xxvii). All American territories (hence, both Puerto Rico and American Samoa) are unincorporated. Territories can also be organised or unorganised. An organised territory is one in which there is an Organic Act (from which citizenship is also acquired). Puerto Rico is an organised territory, but American Samoa is exceptional in the American territories, being the only unorganised territory. This means that American Samoans are US “nationals”. It seems important to further review what this entails for Puerto Rico and American Samoa.

Puerto Rico is not a constituent member of the American federation. Rather, it belongs to it and is therefore subject to the plenary powers of the United States Congress; in that sense, Puerto Ricans are “foreign in a domestic sense” (Duffy Burnett and Marshall, 2001). Puerto Rico was under Spanish colonial rule for more than 400 years, and it did not acquire self-government until 1897, when Spain finally allowed Puerto Ricans to have representation in

Madrid, an autonomous government, and their own constitution (Fernández, 1992). However, this moment of partial emancipation was short-lived, as the Spanish-American War of 1898 resulted in Puerto Rico being given to the US as ‘compensation’ for financial and material losses incurred during the conflict. For the first two years after the US invasion of the island, Puerto Rico was under martial law. Although this martial law lasted only two years, the US military occupation of the archipelago is considered to be much longer. The takeover of much land around the archipelago, in the main island of Puerto Rico, but the use of Vieques and Culebra as bombs testing sites are examples of this long-lasting and still enduring presence of the US military domination in Puerto Rico (Berman Santana, 2006; McCaffrey, 2006). The 1900 Foraker Act provided a civil government for Puerto Rico, though a governor was appointed by the US president, who had the power to cancel or overrule any law voted in on the archipelago. Furthermore, with this act, Puerto Rico was given a ‘voice’ in Congress through the creation of the position of resident commissioner. The resident commissioner’s voice is limited, as he/she cannot vote at Congress and can only speak when invited and only on matters related to the island. In 1917, the Jones Act was passed by the United States Congress. Through the Jones Act, Puerto Ricans were given American citizenship (and, therefore, the potential capacity to move to the mainland and immediately become ‘equal’ to continental US citizens).

The existing status of Puerto Rico was finalised after the Second World War. In 1950, Congress’ Public Law 600 authorised Puerto Rico to adopt its own constitution. In 1952, Puerto Rico’s *Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA) (‘Commonwealth’ in English), was formally established after approval by the population in a referendum and by the United States Congress. In the referendum, almost 80% of voters supported the establishment of the ELA, though the participation rate was less than 55% (Pantojas García, 2013: 44). Since then, this status has prevailed. The ELA status means that residents of Puerto Rico hold US citizenship, can serve in the military and are represented in the House of Representatives by a resident commissioner elected to a four-year term (who does not have the privilege to vote on the floor of the House). They are subject to federal laws and are beneficiaries of federal aid as approved by Congress, do not vote in national elections nor for president, and, in return, pay no federal income tax (unless you work for a federal agency). Goods entering Puerto Rico from outside the United States must pay US duties, and goods shipped out to the 50 states are not subject to tariffs. This has limited the economic power of Puerto Rico.

The case of American Samoa is quite different. The Samoan Islands were of interest to many great powers, mostly Great Britain, Germany and the United States in the 19th Century. It is worth noting that the US had interest in Samoa, and particularly Pago Pago Harbour, a natural inlet on the island of Tutuila and one of the deepest and most sheltered harbours in the Pacific Ocean, since the mid-1800s. The harbour was a “strategic positioning within the commercial shipping lines among East Asia, colonial-Pacific outposts, and the United States” (Memea Kruse, 2018: 6). In the late 1800s, after getting involved in and influencing the various wars and battles among Samoan chiefs, the three above-mentioned powers were ready to fight over the territory. All historical accounts tell a similar story (Leibowitz, 1989; Memea Kruse, 2018). In March 1889, American, British and German naval ships were moored in Apia (the capital of present-day Samoa, the independent state west of American Samoa), ready for outright war over the exclusive rights to Pago Pago (the capital of American Samoa) and the Southern Ocean trans-Pacific route. However, a two-day hurricane hit the Samoan Islands, capsizing the ships and causing many deaths, resulting in a cessation of hostilities between the US, Great Britain and Germany. Instead, the Treaty of Berlin (1889) was signed, creating a condominium in Samoa between the United States, Germany and Great Britain designed to guarantee the preservation of the rights of the three powers as secured in

separate treaties with the Samoan régime in 1878 and 1879. The three powers were responsible for governing the Samoan Islands in rotation. The condominium ended in political shambles after ten years with the ratification of the Tripartite Convention of 1899 and the resulting partition of the Samoan archipelago. That is when the US acquired the eastern group of the Samoan Islands (made up of five main islands and two coral atolls, the biggest being Tutuila, home of the capital, Pago Pago, which encompasses most of the island at 145 km²). Though the Convention divided the Samoan Islands among the three states, there were no Samoan representatives present during the talks.

Furthermore, in 1900 and 1904, various chiefs of the eastern islands signed “deeds of cession”, accepting US territorial status for what came to be known as American Samoa. The high chiefs in both deeds of cession were very clear about their intentions:

for the promotion of the peace and welfare of the people of said islands, for the establishment of a good and sound government, and for the preservation of the rights and property of the inhabitants of said islands, the chiefs, rulers and people thereof are desirous of granting unto the said government of the United States full powers and authority to enact proper legislation. (ASCA sec. 2, 1981)

The deeds received very little attention in the continental United States, with the United States not officially recognising the cession until the 1920s (Leibowitz, 1989: 416). Upon the deeds of cession, American Samoa was under the control of the Department of the Navy and the US naval commander served as governor for the territory. With the advent of oil, instead of coal, as the main fuel for naval vessels following World War I, the United States' interest in the archipelago declined, but

World War II brought a major upgrade to the territory's infrastructure in preparation for potential hostilities. Unlike many of the other Pacific Islands, American Samoa never became a site for serious combat. However, many Samoans served in the local marine guard and eventually transferred into the US Navy. (Weaver, 2008: 346)

The Navy administered the territory until 1951 when President Truman delegated management of the territory to the United States Secretary of the Interior. This brought important and lasting changes. Instead of the US naval commander serving in the role of governor, the Secretary of the Interior appointed a civilian governor. The governor was appointed by the department even after the territory's first constitution was adopted in 1960 and its second took effect in 1967. Efforts by American Samoans to achieve greater control over their own affairs led to an amendment that in 1977 provided for an elected governor and an elected house of representatives for the first time (Maddex, 2006: 457; Rivera Ramos, 2016). Throughout all of those changes, it is important to note that the United States also never passed an Organic Act (as it did several times for Puerto Rico), and many of the islands' leaders) have resisted efforts to incorporate American Samoa into the US or to become citizens instead of nationals (Rivera Ramos, 2016; Mack, 2017; Memea Kruse, 2018). Being a national means the following:

you have a different, more limited visa eligibility when travelling aboard. If you move to the states, you can't serve on juries, and you may have a hard time applying for a job because you're not a citizen but also don't have a green card or work visa... you also can't vote in elections - presidential or otherwise... To

gain all these rights, you have to become naturalized, like any immigrant, even if you were born in the US. (Mack, 2017: 71).

For members of the *Fono* (American Samoa's legislature), resistance to citizenship is mostly rooted in the fear of losing *Fa'a Samoa*. As Leibowitz explains: "Samoa's great distance from the rest of the United States, Samoan control over immigration¹, and legal recognition by the Federal government of the distinctive Samoan way of life, especially the *matai* (chief-based) structure of social organisation² and the land tenure system, insulated the Samoan people from the cultural impact of the US political relationship" (1989: 423). Most importantly, passing an Organic Act would bind American Samoa to the US Constitution and "since land ownership is also tied to blood quantum as a measure of American Samoan ancestry, one concern with the application of the US Constitution is that strict application of the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment would remove such restrictions on land ownership and hasten alienation of land from the indigenous population." (Uperesa and Garriga-López, 2017: 55). Terence Wesley-Smith, in an article about decolonisation in Oceania, calls for a strengthening of existing institutions that is consistent with indigenous practices and forms that have proved sustainable. He points out that the main difficulty in this regard is not the design of institutions or even the availability of resources but "to change the wider political culture in which western-style state institutions must operate over the longer term" (2007: 41). Hence, keeping the *Fa'a Samoa*, the Indigenous ways of life is a key argument made by the political elite in American Samoa for maintaining the current status.

It should be noted that there is nonetheless some resistance to and resentment of aspects of the US-American Samoa relationship. The anomaly of being nationals and not US citizens has been a source of frustration for many American Samoans living on the US mainland where they have been ineligible for many federal opportunities. A legal challenge to the "second-class status" (Morrison, 2013: 1) is currently winding its way through courts. In December 2019, Federal Judge Clark Waddoups ruled in favour of Utah (but American Samoa born) residents John Fitesamanu, Pale Tul and Rosavitra Tuli, who challenged their status as "non-citizen nationals," which they argued barred them from voting, as well as certain employment opportunities. Judge Waddoups ordered the US government to issue American Samoans passports that reflect their birthright citizenship. This ruling was not well received by the American Samoan territorial government. Through its non-voting representative at Congress, Aumua Amata, it declared:

It will certainly come as a surprise to tens of thousands of American Samoans that a federal judge in Utah has ruled that they are now United States citizens. Because the residents of American Samoa have vibrant democratic processes and already had a path to citizenship that I had worked to make even more accessible, the ruling is particularly unwelcome and inappropriate... We are committed to the preservation of Fa'a Samoa, and we intend to appeal this ruling, even as we work to make sure that a

¹ American Samoa is the only US territory overseeing its immigration and borders policy. Even an American citizen needs to present a valid US passport, and immigration is highly restricted. American Samoa has the ability to grant visas and quotas to officials, and US citizens are also included in the 'alien' policy of American Samoa (Leibowitz, 1989, American Samoa Bar Association, 2011).

² The *matai*, Samoan chiefs, are at the apex of a sophisticated hierarchical system and are responsible for maintaining the respect, traditions, and administration of the villages.

path to individual citizenship is available and accessible to all American Samoans who choose to pursue it (Quoted in Cagurangan, 2019).

There is a high chance that the case will make its way to the Supreme Court as the territorial government and leaders of American Samoa sees it as a threat to the island's autonomy.

As it was outlined, both American territories have a different, but tense relationship and history with the US. Table 2 provides a summary of the historical, political and geographical contexts of both archipelagos.

	Puerto Rico	American Samoa
Territory (in km ²)	9104 km ²	199 km ²
Population	3,337,000 (2017)	55,641 (2017) or 62,117 (2018.)*
Distance (in km) from the US (closest point and Washington)	1631 kilometres from Miami (Florida) and 2510 kilometres from Washington	4180 kilometres from Honolulu (Hawai'i) and 11,310 kilometres from Washington
Territorial Status	Unincorporated and organised; Commonwealth (<i>Estado Libre Asociado</i> in Spanish) since 1952; ceded by Spain to the US via the Treaty of Paris in 1898	Unincorporated and unorganised; ceded by Samoan chiefs according to the 1900 and 1904 Deeds of Cession.
Citizenship (and meaning)	US Citizens (can freely move to any of the 50 states and are automatically conferred the same rights (voting, etc.) as any other citizen. Citizenship was conferred by the 1917 Jones Act	US nationals (need to pass a citizenship test to become US citizens if they move to the continental US). A recent (December 2019) Federal court case argues that American Samoans should be given citizenship.
Representation in US Congress	Resident Commissioner (non-voting and limited voice) (was appointed by the US president until the Jones Act in 1917)	Delegate (limited role). American Samoa was first granted representation in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1978. The first delegate began serving in January 1981.
Constitution	Puerto Rican constitution established the Commonwealth status in 1952 and was voted on by the people in a referendum	Local Constitution (first adopted in 1960, revised in 1967)
Land system/Title	Survey land system (as in the US)/no nobility title	Mix of communal and individual land rights/ <i>matai</i> system (nobility)
Visits by American Presidents	Six official visits (the latest in 2016 by Trump weeks after Hurricane Maria); four non-official visits	One official visit by Johnson in 1966

Table 2 – Comparison of Puerto Rico and American Samoa

* Kruse (2018: 37) identifies that there are disparities between the US Census and the American Samoa Government Department of Commerce population counts. I have chosen to include both counts here.

Imposition vs. Cession; Confrontation vs. Collaboration: Two island territories, two different pathways

The previous section revealed important historical, geographical and political contexts that can at least partially explain why American Samoa does not exhibit nationalism in the same way as Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico is, according to the distance criteria, is fairly far from the central state (and would receive the rating 2 according to Fazi). American Samoa is very far from the central state (and hence would receive the rating 3). Both territories have been subjected to various levels of involvement by the metropole. On one hand, Puerto Rico, since its acquisition by the US through the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War, was under various Organic Acts until it finally reached its current status in 1952. Citizenship was given to Puerto Ricans in 1917 through the Jones Act. Furthermore, in the first half of the 20th Century, the US “vigorously promoted Americanization (policy of cultural assimilation)” (Barreto, 2001: 24). Despite those efforts, Puerto Rico resisted. It is worth noting here a few events that shaped Puerto Rico’s resistance. In the 1930s, the then-Nationalist Party, advocating independence, organised a series of events that ended dramatically. In October 1935, a confrontation with police at the University of Puerto Rico (at the Río Piedras campus) resulted in the deaths of four nationalist partisans and one policeman. The event is known as the Río Piedras Massacre. This led the party in December 1935 to announce a boycott of all elections (the Party had previously participated in the 1932 elections) held while Puerto Rico remained part of the United States. In March 1937, the Nationalist Party organised a peaceful march in the southern city of Ponce. At the last moment, the permit for the march was withdrawn, and the Insular Police were arrayed against the marchers. They opened fire upon and killed 19, and 200 more were wounded. Other uprisings occurred throughout the 1950s. Today, multiple parties are using the political route to promote independence. In its foundation in 1938, the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) promoted independence through negotiations with the United States. Ultimately, the PPD is the party responsible for enacting the current Commonwealth status. *Independentistas*, feeling betrayed by the PPD’s stance, formed the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP) in 1946. This party has been competing in all major elections in Puerto Rico and received, in recent years, on average, about 5% of the votes. In 2000, the then-FBI director, Louis Freeh, made an unprecedented admission that the FBI had engaged in egregious and illegal action from the 1930s to the 1990s. The PIP, but mainly the Partido Nacionalista and its main leader, Pedro Albizu Campos who endured a tragic series of tortures in prison, among others, were under close surveillance as was anyone supporting them. This could explain why only 4–5% of Puerto Ricans supported independence (Vézina, 2018: 144–145). Even though Puerto Rico has had Commonwealth status since 1952, the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico is far from being resolved. As Perusse states, under both Spain and the United States, “greater autonomy was chosen as the tentative compromise pending a final decision on future status. This was no solution, however, inasmuch as the relationship with the metropolitan power continued to be colonial” (1990: 67).

American Samoa, due to its great distance, has been under the American influence in different ways. Interestingly, whereas it was deemed necessary to Americanise Puerto Rico, American Samoa is the “only off-shore territories who, from the first, received recognition of their unique customs and need for control of their land” (Leibowitz, 1989: 434). The retention of the Samoan way of life does not mean though that American Samoa did not get Americanised. The influence can be traced back to Christian missionaries whose work

started before the deeds of cession. Their impact on the education system (and learning of English) is not to be dismissed. Similarly, the island's economy has been subject to Americanisation. Tuna (both fishing and, then, canning) is a leading industry, subject to American corporate interests. Furthermore, the importance of the army cannot be denied. American Samoa has the highest enlistment in the US military of any state or territory.

The definition of a small island is certainly a contested issue, and no agreed-upon definition of what is 'small' exists. However, following the advice of Grant McCall, it is worth keeping in mind that on "larger islands³, there will be sub-divisions and, in fact, the larger the island, the more these sub-divisions will dominate over the sense of sharing a common terrestrial feature" (1994: 96). The size of American Samoa is minuscule in comparison to Puerto Rico. Both territories are also constituted of multiple islands. In both places, there are differences in sentiments among the residents of the main island and the smaller islands. This is true of the relationship between the Islands of Vieques and Culebra and Puerto Rico. In Vieques, for example, "all of the problems facing Puerto Rico are exemplified... [it becomes] a real barbarity" (anonymous interviewee in Vézina, 2018: 69). In American Samoa, the main island of Tutuila has all the most important offices, industries, colleges, etc. The islands of Manu'a and Tutuila are 130 km apart and, due to the complex *matai* system, quite separate in terms of family and extended family. Both territories have, hence, what McCall (1994) calls "sub-divisions".

Politically speaking, there are interesting differences and parallels between the two territories. On the one hand, Puerto Rico, since European 'discovery' during Columbus' second trip to the Americas, has been under colonial domination. American Samoa's first European/foreigner contact was in 1722 (Memea Kruse, 2018: 16)⁴. Puerto Rico was given as compensation to the United States without consultation of the people of the Islands, whereas the local chiefs ceded American Samoa to the United States. It should be noted that "there is no independence movement to speak of" (Mack, 2017: 77) in American Samoa. On the contrary, and especially since the 1950s, American Samoa's leaders promote the maintenance of 'US national' status in order to preserve the delicate cultural balance now in place in American Samoa. In some ways, American Samoa's governor and the members of the *Fono* embrace the Insular Cases "because the laws offer a certain protection of their status as foreign in a domestic sense - it's a means to insulate *themselves* from the culture-levelling forces of Americanization" (Mack, 2017: 75). Even when thinking about the future status of American Samoa, scholars are very careful in recommending any status change. As Memea Kruse summarises: "changes to the present relationships should be undertaken only after careful analysis of the potential challenges contained in alternative political models" (2018: 189). Her book goes through various options in looking at Samoa and other US territories, and all options seem to compromise either the *matai* system or the benefits received from the US. The party system in American Samoa is also similar to the party system found in the United States, with a Republican Party and Democratic Party. Both the American Samoa Democratic Party and Republican Party are affiliates of the parties on the continental US. Furthermore, ideologically, they advocate respectively for modern and social liberalism and

³ Arguably, McCall's analysis of sub-divisions can also apply to small islands. For example, on Futuna, a French *collectivité d'outre-mer* in the south west Pacific, 5000 people over 80 km² are divided by two kingdoms.

⁴ Fazi (2012: 148) also has a rating for what he calls a "history of outside domination". According to him, Puerto Rico would receive a rating of 1 (as the area has been dominated since the 15th Century) and American Samoa would receive a rating of 2 or 2.5 (as the area started to be contacted by and made agreements with foreigners in the 18th Century).

fiscal and social conservatism. It should nevertheless be noted that the Legislature, or *Fono*, has two chambers. It is autonomous in its disposition of local revenues and is the sole law-making body, although the governor has the power to veto legislation. The House of Representatives has 21 members who are elected for a two-year term: 20 are elected in single-seat constituencies and one by a public meeting on Swains Island. The Senate also has 18 members who are elected for a four-year term *by and from* the chiefs of the islands (American Samoa Government, 2019).

The retention of chiefs' titles and their importance in law making is an important aspect of the Samoan way of life. There is a rather complex and effective cultural political system. The two factions in this system are the *fa'amatai* (chiefly system and protocol) and *fa'a Samoa* (the Samoan way of life, language and customs). The *fa'amatai* includes all levels of the Samoan body of politics; from family, to village, to *fono* (meetings), to district and lastly to national matters. The *fa'a Samoa* is commonly recognised as the definition of the way of life in Samoa. The chiefs' and titles' systems are so much part of the political culture that many, although not all elected officials, including the Governor and Lt. Governor, are required to hold a *matai* title. However, because the importance and relevance of *matai* titles remains paramount in the territory on all political levels, chances of an individual being elected to any office without holding a *matai* title are slim. Overall, it might seem that American Samoa benefits from 'benign neglect' from the United States or that American Samoans should be grateful for the higher standards of living and funds received through the relationship with the US, but as, Fa'anofo Lisacaire Uperesa and Adriana María Garriga-López rightfully point out: "this obscures what the US receives in return: a foothold in the South Pacific, access to the best deepwater harbor in the area for military and commercial purposes, a high rate of military enlistment, almost unlimited access to cheap local and migrant labor, exclusive economic zones for fishing purposes, and control over the territory" (2017: 63).

By contrast, at various points in its history, Puerto Rico has asked for a change in its status. No less than five (non-binding and locally initiated) plebiscites took place—none of which have been conducive to change⁵. Furthermore, the party system in Puerto Rico is territorialised. The three main parties all advocate for a different status option. The Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) advocates for the status quo or a revised version of the current status; the Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP) promotes the idea of Puerto Rico becoming the 51st US state; and the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP) advocates for independence. The party system exhibits the three main options for nationalist demands described by Lluch (2011, 2012). The territorialisation of the party system in Puerto Rico is so strong that it led some scholars to say:

It is the status problem, the unresolved problem of decolonization, which makes Puerto Rico politically so interesting. It is the context within which the vocabulary of politics is couched in Puerto Rico; in spite of attempts to assume the contrary, it tends to define the political parties themselves and how they are distinguished from each other (Anderson, 1998: 3).

Most scholars agree that the current status is unbearable and colonial in nature (Fernández, 1992; Lluch, 2014; Lecours & Vézina, 2017), and much more so since the 2016 Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) was approved by the US Congress and imposed on the archipelago by the Obama administration. PROMESA's steep

⁵ For more on the plebiscites, the reader is invited to consult the following: Lluch (2012); Duany (2017); Mack (2017); Vézina (2018).

cost for Puerto Rico was the imposition of a seven-member Financial Oversight and Management Board (Oversight Board) to oversee Puerto Rico's finances. The Oversight Board is comprised of seven members appointed by the US president, and it has the authority to supersede local law. It is also needless to bring up the poor response received from the US in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria in September 2017, with President Trump notoriously tossing paper towels in the air (see Image 1).



Figure 3 – President Donald Trump on his official visit to Puerto Rico on October 3, 2017, tossing paper towels around at a distribution centre. (Source: Associated Press, 2017).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article investigated the differences in island nationalism in American Samoa and Puerto Rico. To do so, a literature review of island studies and nationalism studies was performed to develop, and later apply, an island nationalism framework to the two case studies. The initial analysis shows that both distance from the mainland and control by the central state seem to be important factors in the flexibility islands have in being culturally distinct; when the island is closer and the central state is highly involved, nationalism seem to increase. Puerto Rico is closer to the mainland than American Samoa, though still relatively far. Nevertheless, the strategic importance of Puerto Rico (military, navigation, proximity to Cuba, etc.) has led the island to be under constant supervision from the US, and even more so since the enactment of PROMESA in 2016, which established an Oversight Board to control the island's finances. American Samoa, being the furthest overseas possession of the United States, has been under relative supervision from the US, who delegated its power over the islands to the American Navy until 1951. In terms of political domination, Puerto Rico was conquered by the United States during the Spanish-American War and was given to the US as compensation in 1898. The island's colonial history, both under Spain, and now for more than a century, under the US, has been one of domination. American Samoa was ceded through the Deeds of Cession of 1900 and 1904 to the United States. In doing so, the local chiefs ensured that the Samoan way of life (including the *matai* system and the communal land system) would be maintained. American Samoa has a party

system similar to that in the United States and has embraced English. Puerto Rico, on the other hand, has opposed the imposition of English, has fought processes of assimilation, and has developed a territorialised party system around the issue of the archipelago's status. Whether or not any change of status will occur in either of the territories is unclear, and ultimately the US Congress has authority over this; however, it is clear that the struggle and agency of islanders cannot be dismissed or denied.

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