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All Becomes One in the Basin of the Waterfall: Dialectics and Multiple Trajectories of Samoan History before 1900

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Undergraduate

*Ua Aofia i Le Futafu E Tasi*

**All Becomes One in the Basin of the Waterfall**

**Dialectics and Multiple Trajectories of Sāmoan History before 1900**

A Thesis Submitted to the Undergraduate Division of the University of California Berkeley  
in Fulfillment of

Bachelor of Arts

In

Interdisciplinary Studies Field

May 2013

By

Devin Perenise Matamata i Moana Murphy

Thesis Committee

Rakesh Bhandari  
Patrick V. Kirch



*For my grandfather, Unasa Perenise*

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## Acknowledgements

Neither words in English or Sāmoan can fully express my *fa'afetai* (thanks) and *fiafia* (happiness) upon completion of this thesis. I would first like to thank my Sāmoan family – the entire extended Unasa family, *o le 'aiga atoa, pele ile loto* – without whom this journey would never have begun. *Fa'afetai le alofa.*

*Fa'afetai lava* to Tu'u'u Ieti and Vanya Tauleaulo for taking me into their home in Sāmoa. The personal interviews with Tu'u'u Ieti provided the most conclusive contemporary analysis of Sāmoa, and Vanya's action through art has shaped much of my understanding of Sāmoan material culture.

*Fa'afetai le fa'aloalo* to the WIBDI staff for taking me on as an intern. The hands-on field experience working with many of Sāmoa's small-scale rural farmers was invaluable in molding my worldview and analysis of globalization.

*Fa'afetai tele lava i mea uma ua outou a'oa'oina ai a'u* to my professors and mentors at UC Berkeley. Professor Ananya Roy's "Global Poverty" course marked the beginning of my venture into the Global Poverty minor and subsequent grant to conduct field research in Sāmoa with WIBDI.

Professor Gillian Hart's courses – "The History of Development and Underdevelopment" and "Post-Colonial Geography" – laid the foundation of my theoretical lenses through which to

read history. Thank you for teaching me to think relationally, to question “common sense”, and for the Gramscian analysis of the production of space.

Professor Patrick Kirch’s “Biogeography of the South Pacific” was my first formal course on Polynesia. Thank you for advising my thesis, for your time one on one, and for opening my eyes to the rest of the South Pacific’s miraculous history. *Malo’aupito*.

Professor Rakesh Bhandari’s “Critique of Capitalism” course rocketed my analysis of capitalism and industrial society into a fourth dimension. Thank you for advising my thesis, for your courses, and your unending academic support and encouragement. Your pedagogy compels greatness in your students, because you are genuinely interested and care about our academic trajectories.

*Fa’afetai* to Roger Bunch, Eva Marrero and my fellow ISF classmates for your input, comments, feedback and genuine interest in this thesis.

Finally, *fa’afetai telē lava ma fa’afetai le alofa mo lo’u tinā* (my mother) Sharman Murphy, without whom my connection to Sāmoa, this journey, this thesis, and my future would not exist. Thank you for your tireless support, editing and feedback every step of the way. I look forward to the body of work our future holds, and the prospects for our family in Sāmoa.

## Preface

This thesis marks the culmination of a Bachelor of Arts in the Interdisciplinary Studies Field (ISF) at the University of California, Berkeley. My undergraduate career at Cal has taken extreme academic twists and turns – from Creative Writing, to Landscape Architecture, to Global Poverty studies, to Agroecology and Development Studies. This thesis is an amalgamation of the latter half of my time at Cal, weaving the core elements of courses in Post-Colonial Geography, Global Poverty Studies and Development Theory. In a mad dash to formalize my degree, I was fortunate enough to stumble upon the ISF Department, which has allowed me both the academic encouragement and the freedom to pursue my areas of interest with the assurance of school credit. The final title of my area of study is “Sāmoan Post-Colonial Nationalism, Land Tenure and Cultural Resiliency”.

My interest in and research of Sāmoa is rooted in an exploration to not only better comprehend the vast and intricate inner workings of colonialism, capitalism, development and the *fa'aSāmoa* (the Sāmoan way), but to also better understand *who I am*. We have no control over the make-up our biological lineage, but sometimes, life presents us with the opportunity to *choose* family.

My biological grandfather, Robert Murphy, was a doctor hired as staff by the Peace Corps in 1967. In what turned out to be thinly-veiled American neo-imperialism, he accompanied the first group of volunteers ever sent to Western Sāmoa, with the personal assignment of setting up a series of maternal health clinics. At the time the family moved, my

mother, Sharman Murphy – the middle child of five, and the only girl – was fifteen. The family had been residing in Davis, California for the previous 3 years, (while my grandfather completed a Masters in Public Health at Cal), after returning from two years in Afghanistan, where my grandfather had run a hospital out of a two-room mud house.

The Peace Corps wanted my grandfather to design maternal health clinics in a way that would render them reliant on continued American aid. My grandfather, Robert, (or “Mefi,” as he was known by Sāmoans) instead believed that the clinics – mainly located in the rural, coastal villages throughout the main island of Upolu – should be designed to be self-sufficient, so that Sāmoans could operate the clinics without sustained reliance on international aid. The Peace Corps, however, did not share my grandfather’s belief, and, largely because his efforts were successful, they fired him after the first year of his two-year contract.

Upon arriving in Sāmoa, my mother attended Sāmoa College, a government-run secondary school administered by New Zealanders. My mother learned to speak Sāmoan, and at school became good friends with Va and Miriama Unasa – sisters from the extremely rural village of Matafa’a. On weekends, Sharman was invited to return to Matafa’a with Va and Miriama – a routine the three cherished.

After Robert had been fired, the Murphy family moved back to the United States. My mother, however, opted to stay behind in Sāmoa and finish her schooling. She was adopted into the Unasa family, and lived with Va and Miriama for the next year. In the years that followed,

she traveled back and forth between Sāmoa and the United States, retaining close ties with the Unasa family.

My mother became very ill when I was five, and was not able to take me to Sāmoa until I was eighteen. My first trip to the country was for my adopted Sāmoan grandfather's funeral – Unasa, who had given me my Sāmoan name, but whom I never had the chance to meet. Unasa was buried in Matafa'a. Upon returning to Cal from my first two-week trip to Sāmoa, I set to work devising an academic plan that would bring me back to the South Pacific. After taking Professor Ananya Roy's "Global Poverty" course, I declared the Global Poverty Studied minor and received a grant from the Blum Center for Developing Economies' Global Poverty Department to spend three months in Sāmoa during the summer of 2011.

During my second trip to Sāmoa, I interned with a non-profit called Women in Business Development Inc (WIBDI). Originally started as a women's handicraft collective, WIBDI has since evolved to encompass microfinance and organic agriculture. During my internship, I visited many of WIBDI's 300 rural family farms, and engaged in designing an education program for teaching organic farming practices.

As of now, my third and last trip to Sāmoa was for two weeks in January of 2012. My mother and I returned to Matafa'a for the unveiling of Unasa's tomb. Sāmoan burial practices include an unveiling ceremony of tombs, usually two years after the initial burial. Also, my Aunt Va and two of my female cousins took *matai* (chief) titles.

Upon returning to Cal for my final year, I knew I wanted to write my senior thesis about some aspect of Sāmoa. Originally inspired by my time working with WIBDI, I set out writing an overview of Sāmoa’s current prospects for sustainable agricultural development and land retention. I began to increasingly see the importance of looking at the past to help explain and comprehend the current conjuncture in Sāmoa. This thesis then went through an immense overhaul, and as it stands now, only chronicles Sāmoan history up until the year 1900. I plan to continue work on the thesis after graduation, and to pursue the subject further during some form of graduate studies.

Professor Rakesh Bhandari’s “Critique of Capitalism” course marked the beginning of my recent academic and intellectual journey. Professor Gillian Hart’s courses – “The History of Development and Underdevelopment” and “Post-Colonial Geography” – allowed me to view history through a relational lens and to be cognizant of what is taken for granted. Finally, Professor Patrick Kirch’s “Biogeography of the South Pacific” carried me through my final semester at Cal – my first formal course on Polynesia, and the inspiration behind the first chapter of the thesis.

### **Sources**

First, I would like to give a very brief description of the pronunciation and spelling conventions of the Sāmoan language. Many of the Sāmoan words used in this thesis have been italicized. In Sāmoan, glottal stops are indicated with a single quote mark: ‘. Stress marks over specific letter indicate longer-held vowel sounds. The letter “g” alone is pronounced “ng” as in

“song”. In colloquial speech, the letters “t” and “n” are converted to “k” and “ng” sounds. For this thesis, all Sāmoan words are written in the formal format.

As this thesis makes the conscious effort to engage in an intellectual intervention about the way Sāmoan history is viewed through both Western and Sāmoan lenses, I would like to briefly detail the scholarly sources I have employed. In general, the body of Western scholarship concerning Sāmoan is relatively small. Written history from a Sāmoan perspective is even rarer.

In researching the political landscape of pre-1900 Sāmoa from a Western account, I found Keesing (1934), Kennedy (1974) and Field (1984) to be the most accurate. This is not to say they were completely “correct”, either politically or factually. In Keesing’s “Modern Sāmoa: Its Government and Changing Life”, I found a thoughtful detailing of Sāmoan mythology and spirituality. Keesing was a cultural anthropologist at the University of Hawaii who was later appointed as the senior United States commissioner to the South Pacific by President Truman. Kennedy’s “Sāmoan Tangle: A Study in Anglo-German-American Relations 1878-1900” provided the most expansive chronological account of the interplay among German, British and American imperial forces vying for political control over Sāmoa before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Kennedy is a British historian at Yale University who specializes in the history of international relations and economic power. His book is, however, completely devoid of a Sāmoan perspective of these events. Finally, Field’s “Mau: Sāmoa’s Struggle for Freedom” provides a fairly expansive account of Sāmoa’s non-violent movement for Independence during the early 1900’s. Field is an independent journalist from New Zealand, who married a Sāmoan. In this thesis I do not reach past the year 1900, and draw only on Field’s writing of the events

that led up to the colonial partitioning of the Sāmoan archipelago into Western and American Sāmoa.

Sāmoan authors were more difficult to find or access. The few works I was able to find both complimented and contradicted Western accounts of Sāmoan history. Various dates of significant events were often different, but the most important distinction was these authors' takes on the meaning behind certain Sāmoan actions. Meleisea (1987 and 1996) is the most well known contemporary Sāmoan historian, who currently serves as a Judge of the Land and Titles Court in Sāmoa. I found the graduate publication of Alofaitulu (2011) from the University of Hawaii to be the most informative of Sāmoan mythology and arrival of Christian missionaries in Sāmoa. Tuimaleali'ifano (1998) and Tu'u'u (1999 and 2001) provided a plethora of the history and lineage of Sāmoan *matai* (chief), and important "pre-historic" dates.

Finally, the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis must be attributed to the works of two contemporary feminist geographers: Doreen Massey and Jocelyn Linnekin. In a broad sense, Massey's (2005) "For Space" drove my intellectual endeavors to new heights: allowing me to conceive of the past in a relational, "open" manner, allowing room for a multiplicity of historical trajectories. Linnekin's expansive series of scholarly journal articles about specific aspects of Sāmoan and Polynesian history stand alone in their political analysis, and inspired much my theoretical framework.

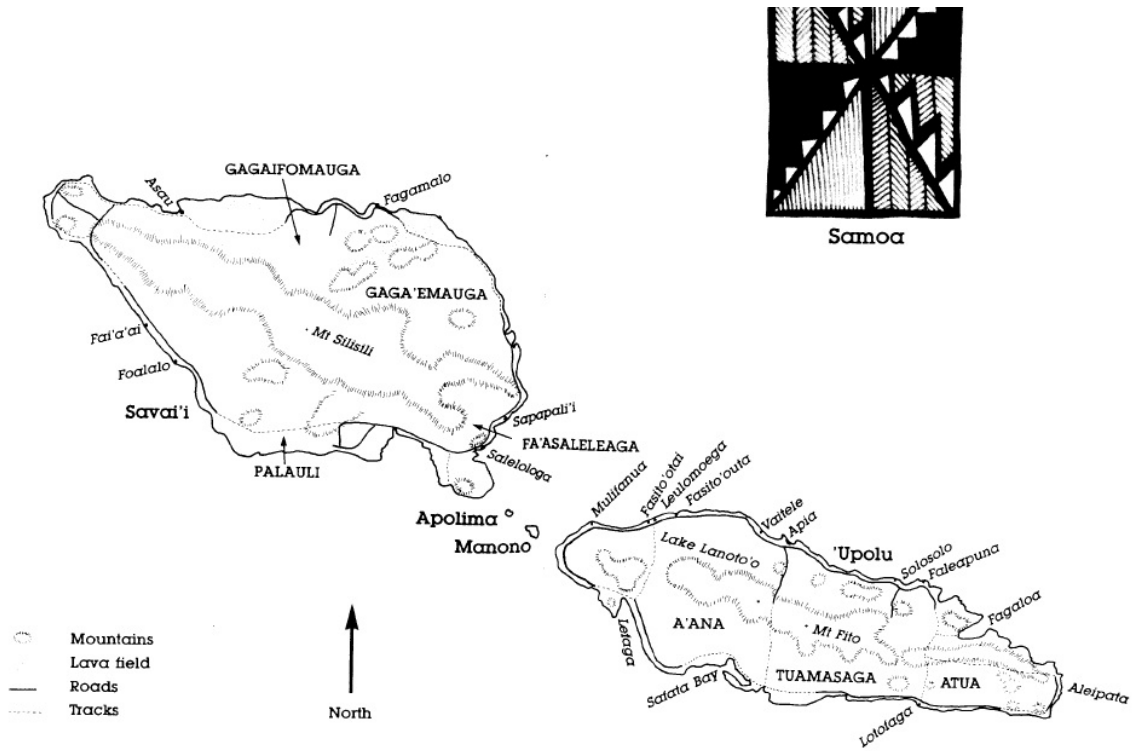


Figure 1. Map of Sāmoa (adapted from Field: 1984).

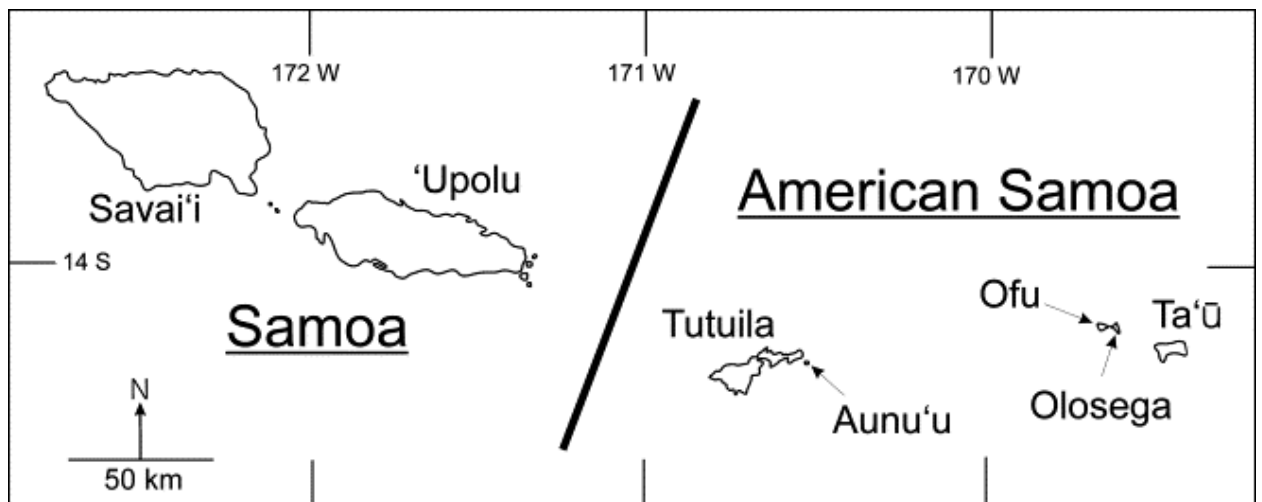


Figure 2. Map of entire Sāmoan Archipelago (Alexander Turnbull Library).

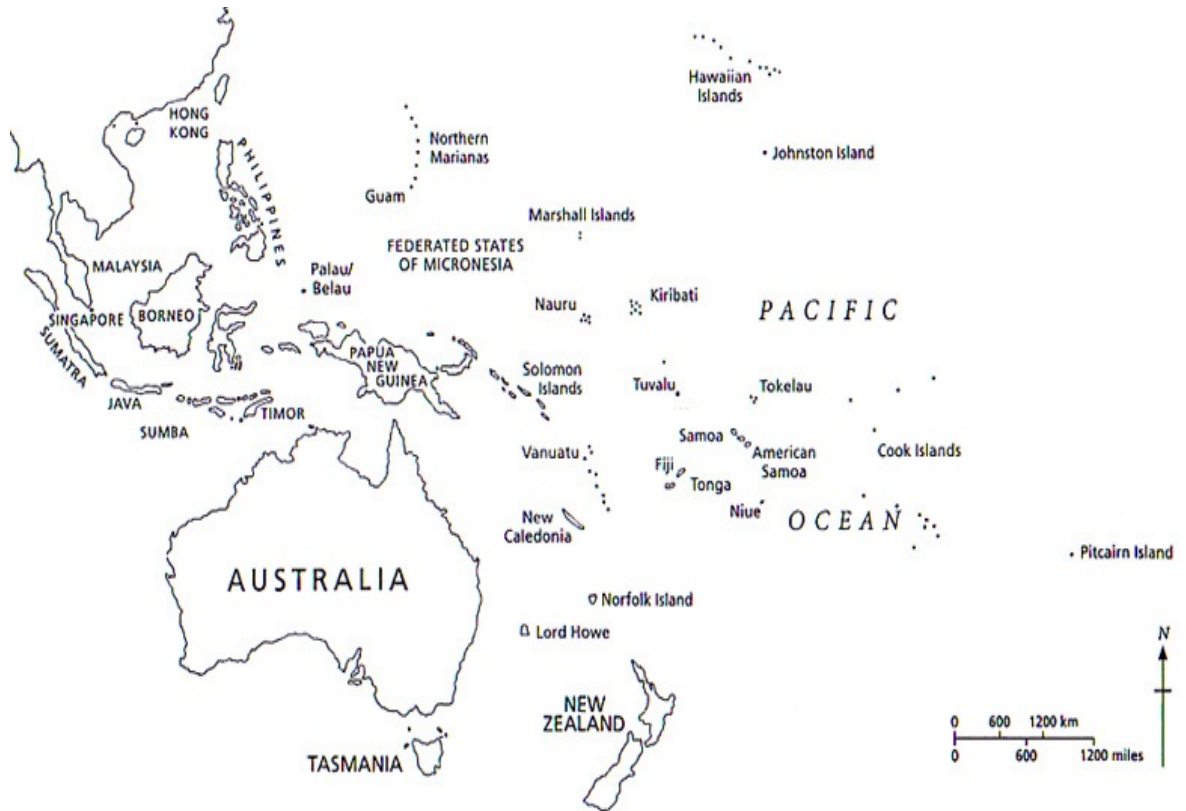


Figure 3. Map of the South Pacific (adapted from Alexander Turnbull Library).

# Chapter I.

## *Peopling of the Pacific*

### Dispelling Prioritization of “Post-Contact” Historicization of Polynesia

Early Western narratives of South Pacific “discoveries” recount explorers’ great surprise that nearly all inhabitable, remote islands of the Pacific had *already* been discovered and populated. Even so, in almost every Western historical narrative, a given island’s history begins with its “discovery” by Europeans. And despite the surprise, there is never much inquiry<sup>1</sup> into *how* these newly discovered people reached their respective islands. This omission of inquiry de-historicizes other peoples and their respective narratives, leading one to think that these Pacific Islanders simply... sprouted from lava? emerged from coral? are fixed entities, unmoving, unchanging, bounded in time and space by a fossilized historical trajectory?

Framing history from the vantage point of Western “discovery” washes away all other history, and constructs a “truth” that history begins upon contact with the West. In the Pacific, as with all other “discovered” pockets of the Earth, the original peoples possess complex and interconnected histories, developed long before and quite separate from Western contact. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Captain Cook is a notable exception.

case of Sāmoa, this “pre-history” traces back to the shores of China and Taiwan, stretches from Madagascar to the shores of Chile, and embodies some of the most impressive and mysterious chapters in the history of human migration.

The telling of “pre-contact” Sāmoan history is vital in not only countering the overwhelming and troubling trend in the majority of Western scholarship to tell *only* “post-contact” history, but in understanding the confluence of political conflict, resistance and resilience from which the *fa’aSāmoa*<sup>2</sup> (the Sāmoan Way) emerged – *all* several centuries before Western contact.

Modern *Homo sapien* expansion into and throughout Oceania began at least 40,000 years ago (Kirch, 131). While the mode of water transportation remains a subject of scholarly debate, humans somehow crossed the water barrier of “Wallacea” – separating the ancient continents of “Sunda” and “Sahul” – during the mid-Pleistocene, arriving in Near Oceania, the area now known as New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago (Kirch, 131)<sup>3</sup>. Recent developments in radiocarbon dating have confirmed previously-found archeological evidence in present-day Papua New Guinea to verify these dates (Kirch, 2013).

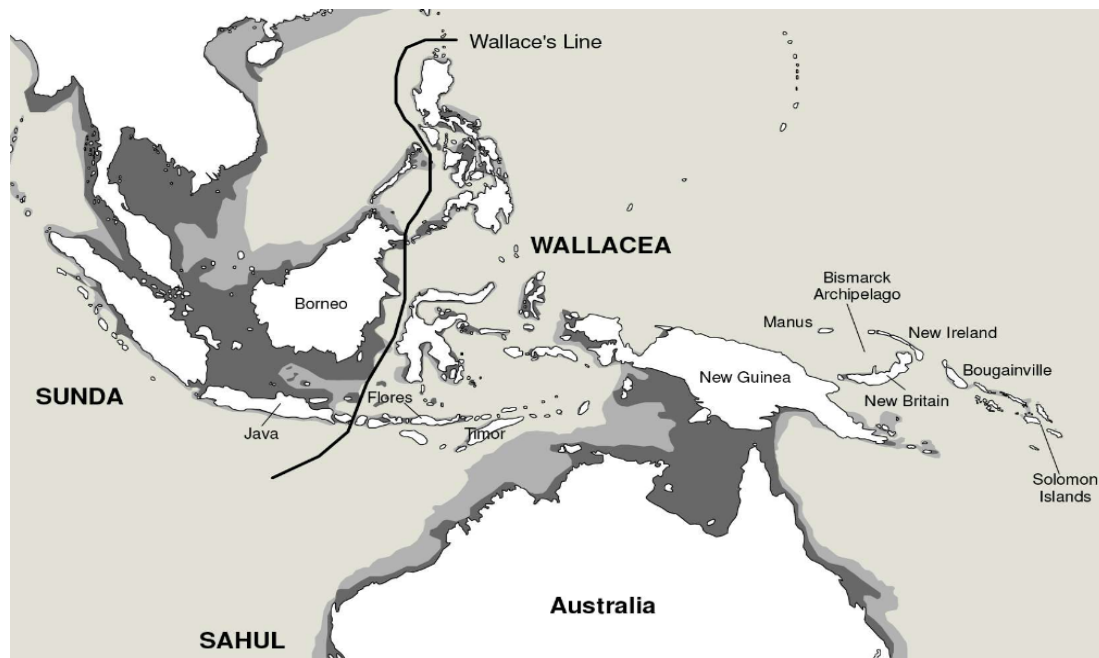
Sunda, or Sundaland, comprised much of current South East Asia, and is the birthplace of the Austronesian language family, which can be traced to Taiwan, and possibly even to the adjacent coast of southern China, although the expansion of the Chinese language has displaced any Austronesian speakers from this region today (Kirch, 135). Sahul – sometimes referred to

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<sup>2</sup> There are many conventions for the spelling of this word. I have found that “*fa’aSāmoa*” is the most widely accepted spelling.

<sup>3</sup> This is contemporary archeological terminology.

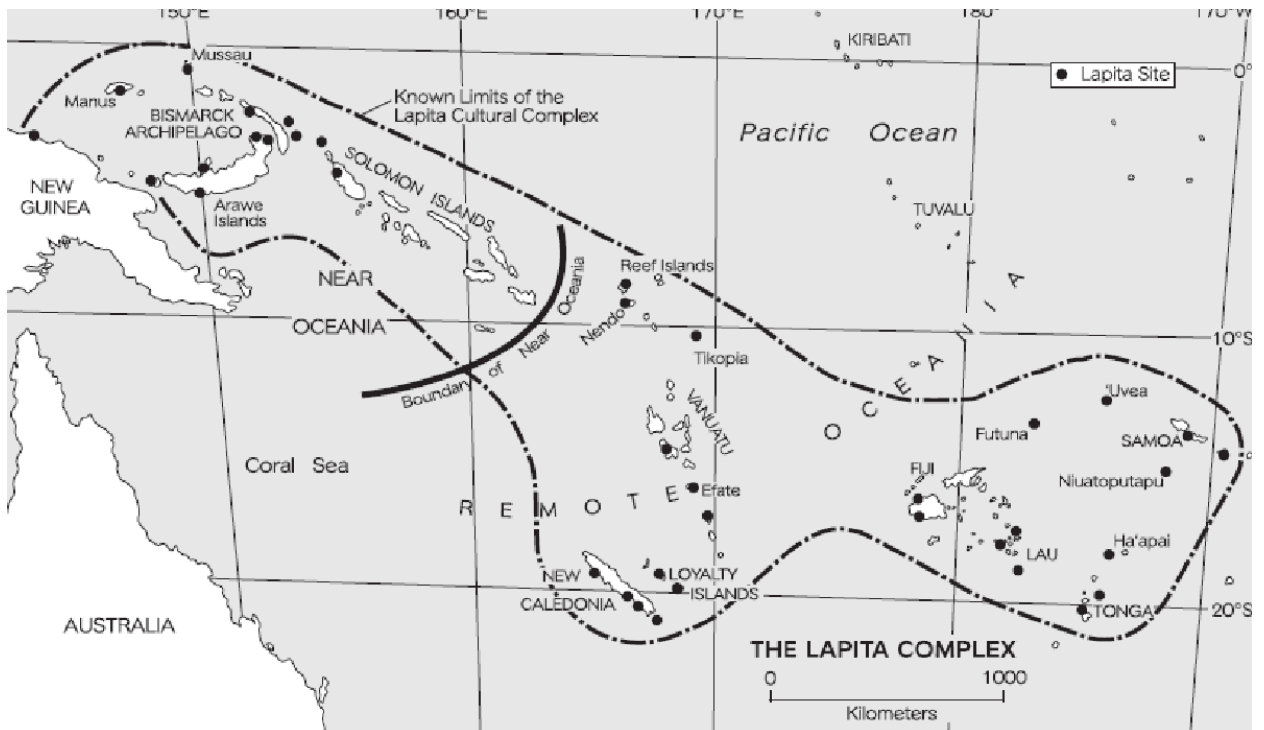
as “Pleistocene Australia-New Guinea” (O’Connell and Allen, 5), or “Greater Australia” (which implies a definite bias) – consisted of what is now the continent of Australia and the continent-sized island of New Guinea, once conjoined. The subsequent splitting of Sahul explains the distantly traceable genetic and linguistic similarities between Papuan and Australian language and ethnic groups (Friedlaender, 1).



**Figure 4. Map of the Wallace Line separating Sunda and Sahul (O’Connell: 2008).**

New Guinea is referred to as Near Oceania (near to Southeast Asia), which also includes the Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomon Islands. All other Pacific islands are known as Remote Oceania, although this distinction is not entirely determined by geographic location east of Near Oceania, but rather by time of human colonization. Within Remote Oceania, the islands of Tonga, Sāmoa, Futuna and ‘Uvea constitute what is known as Western Polynesia, and were the first groups of islands to be populated, a little over 3,000 years ago. The core archipelagos of

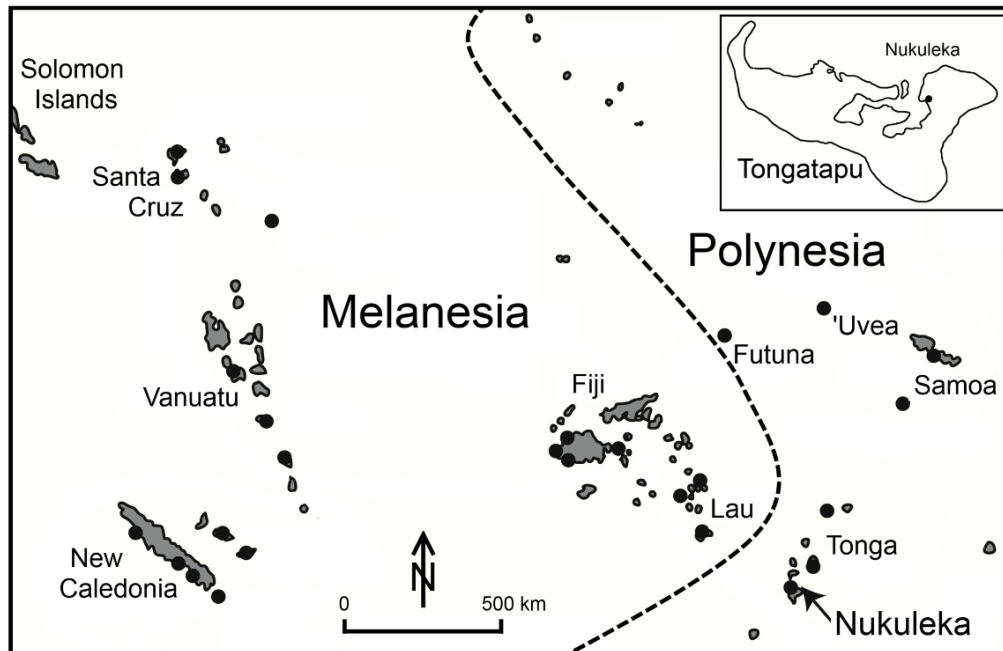
Eastern Polynesia include the Society Islands, the Marquesas, the Cooks, the Tuamotus, and the Australs. Hawaii, New Zealand and Easter Island are the marginal extremes of Eastern Polynesia (Kirch, 2013). Again, the term “Eastern” Polynesia is not consistent with longitudinal geography, but with chronology of human arrival; this area was colonized between 900-1250 AD (Kirch, 2013).



**Figure 5. Map of the Southwestern Pacific showing the extent of the Lapita Cultural Complex (Kirch, 138).**

Eastward from Sahul, seafaring was made easier by “stepping stone” islands: “hotspot islands” located in visible proximity to one another. Expansion slowed, however, once humans reached the end of the Solomon Island chain, whose closest island relative to the East – Santa Cruz – is not for another 450 kilometers (Kirch, 2013). The first group of humans to venture into

Remote Oceania is known as the Lapita people<sup>4</sup>: speakers of Proto-Oceanic, a language ancestral to Proto-Polynesian. In Western Polynesia the oldest archeological evidence of Lapita arrival was found in the village of Nukuleka on the main Tongan island of Tongatapu, dating back to almost exactly 2838 BP (Before Present) (Burley, 1).



**Figure 6. Map distinguishing Melanesia with Polynesia, indicating the first archeological evidence of human arrival in Polynesia (Burley, 1).**

During sea voyages that could last up to two months, the Lapita people “transported landscapes,” by packing pigs, chickens, dogs, rats<sup>5</sup>, and a variety of crops – such as taro and bananas – in the hopes of successfully colonizing any newfound lands. The Lapita people who reached Western Polynesia possessed distinctive pottery with prominent facial motifs. The “small rake-like implements” (Holmes, 15) used to incise the finer pottery, similar to dentate

<sup>4</sup> “Lapita” proper is the name of the archaeological culture, so the people themselves are referred to as Lapita people (Kirch, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> There is some controversy about whether early Polynesians intentionally transported rats (*rattus exulans*). One camp argues that these rats were stowaways, while others argue that rats were intentionally carried aboard as small food packages.

combs, were later adapted for use in Polynesian tattooing. Lapita pottery was “slab or coil built, tempered with sand and shell and fired at low temperatures” (Holmes, 15). Archeological remains found in both Tonga and Sāmoa have revealed that the Lapita also used stone adzes, shell bracelets, coral and sea urchin files, and “shell octopus lures, fishhooks and net sinkers, and obsidian flake tools” (Holmes, 15).



**Figure 7. Example of Lapita Pottery, found in Efate, Vanuatu (Alvarez: 2013).**

Lapita pottery is often offered as an example of technological “de-evolution” – offsetting the theory of technological determinism, or the idea that human technological innovation inevitably “progresses,” since archeological records show that Lapita pottery declined in quality, and was eventually abandoned altogether. However, rather than viewing the decline in quality of pottery as “de-evolution” – with its connotation that going “backwards” is negative, from within a worldview that views “improvement” as linear and one-way – we might instead view this change as adaptation. An original hypothesis posited that as the Lapita people ventured farther into Oceania, the remote, depauperate islands were void of any suitable clay soils from which to

shape their intricate pottery. This theory has been discredited, however, as there is suitable clay soil on almost all inhabitable islands colonized by the Lapita people. What then, could have led to this eventual decline? In Sāmoa, ornate pottery receded into what is known as Polynesian Plain Ware pottery for a time, and eventually clay pots were abandoned all together. The carving of wooden bowls – especially used in kava ceremonies – came to replace earlier forms of pottery. The pottery carved from Sāmoa’s exquisite hardwood trees equaled the earlier clay pottery in intricacy and ornamentation.

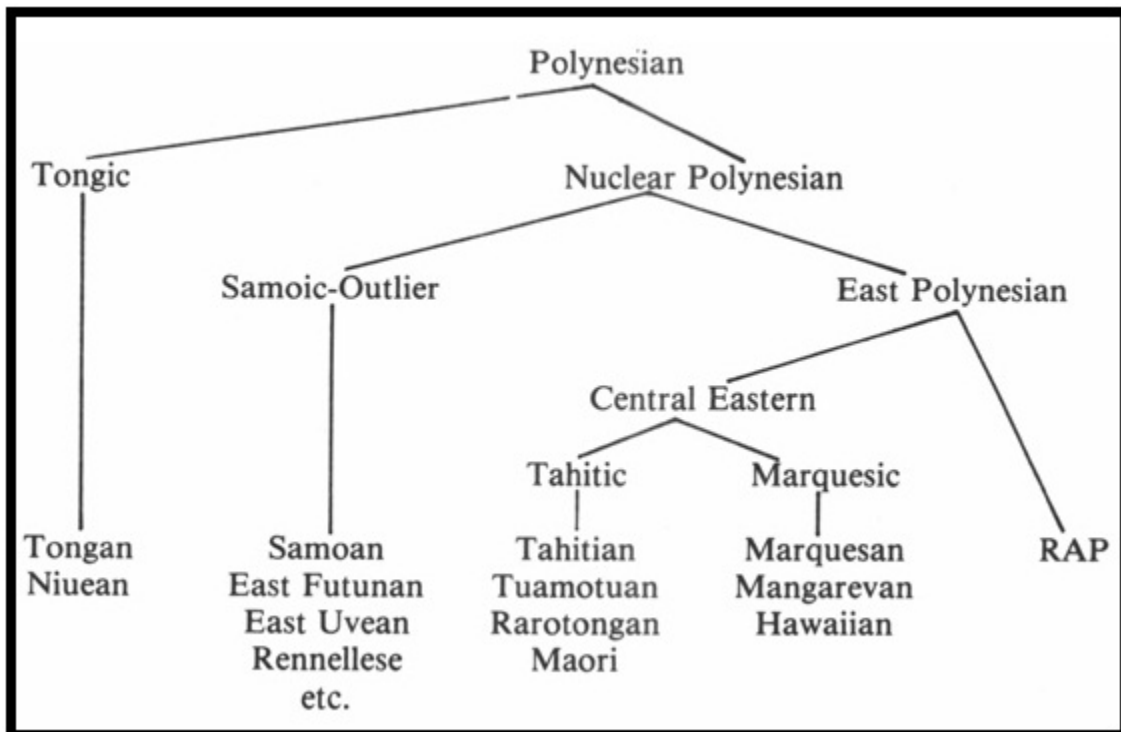


**Figure 8. Sāmoan ceremonial kava bowl (Alexander Turnbull Library).**

The Lapita people who first reached the Tonga-Sāmoa region, around 500 BC, are known as the Eastern Lapita (Kirch, 2013), from whom the Sāmoan and Tongan cultures are descended. Eventually, the Lapita completely declined as a uniform culture, leaving the series of differentiated Polynesian cultures found in the South Pacific today. Out of this emergence, the Tongan and then the Sāmoan peoples are the first Polynesians.

The linguistic differentiation between the Tongan and Sāmoan languages resulted in a breakup of the Proto-Polynesian language family, (itself a subgroup of Proto-Oceanic, a further

sub-group within the Austronesian family), that resulted in “two distinct branches: Tongic, and Proto Nuclear Polynesian” (Kirch, 140). The Sāmoan language descended from the “Nuclear Polynesian subgroup, as do the Outlier Polynesian languages” (Kirch, 140) found in Eastern Polynesia. The Tongan language is perhaps the most retentive of Proto-Polynesian, whereas Sāmoan evolved from the Sāmoic Proto-Polynesian language sub-group.



**Figure 9. Proto-Polynesian language tree (Feinburg, 373).**

Polynesian voyaging spanned the entirety of the Pacific, eventually even reaching the coast of South America. There, Polynesians traded chickens for the sweet potato, which they transported back to Easter Island and then all the way out to Western Polynesia (Roullier, 1)<sup>6</sup>,

<sup>6</sup> The Mapuche – indigenous Chileans – called the sweet potato “kumar”. All words in Polynesian languages must end with a vowel, so the Polynesian word for sweet potato became some variation of “kumara” – a name that stuck even when the sweet potato reached New Guinea. For further detail, see Yen’s (1974) Tripartite Hypothesis.

centuries before any Western contact. The Polynesian arrival on South American shores has been attributed to Easter Islanders, but these Polynesians “may well have come from the Australs or from Mangareva” (Kirch, 2013). While the continued colonization by Polynesians of the rest of the Pacific remains perhaps the most impressive saga in the history of human navigation, my in-depth chronicling of the peopling of the Pacific will stop with Sāmoa.

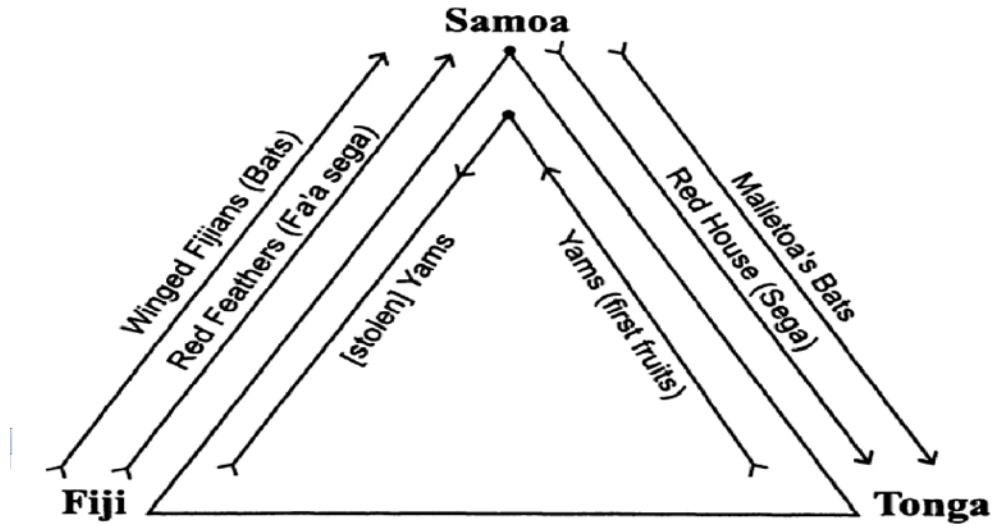
### **Pologa: The Tongan Maritime Chiefdom**

Archeological evidence shows that Lapita people first reached the Tongan islands, and shortly thereafter colonized the Sāmoa island chain, approximately 3,5000 years ago (Irwin, 68). Tonga developed one of the most hierarchical indigenous political systems of any Polynesian society. This vertical social stratification was accompanied by a “renowned Polynesian obsession with genealogy – essential to the legitimation of chiefly titles – [that] was nowhere more developed than in Tonga” (Kirch, 223). Also, Tonga “stands unique among the indigenous Polynesian chiefdoms for its extensive and regular long-distance exchange relations with societies beyond its own geographic and political borders” (Kirch, 238) – principally Fiji and Sāmoa – eventually giving rise to what is often termed the “Tongan Maritime Empire” (Aswani, 148).

Here I would like to contest the imposition of the word “empire” – a Western categorization – and propose that we think of this Tongan maritime presence in the Pacific instead as a “chiefdom” or “network”. I contest the term “empire” in an attempt to guard against the common, Western, and even Marxist understanding of the term. The Tongan rule during this

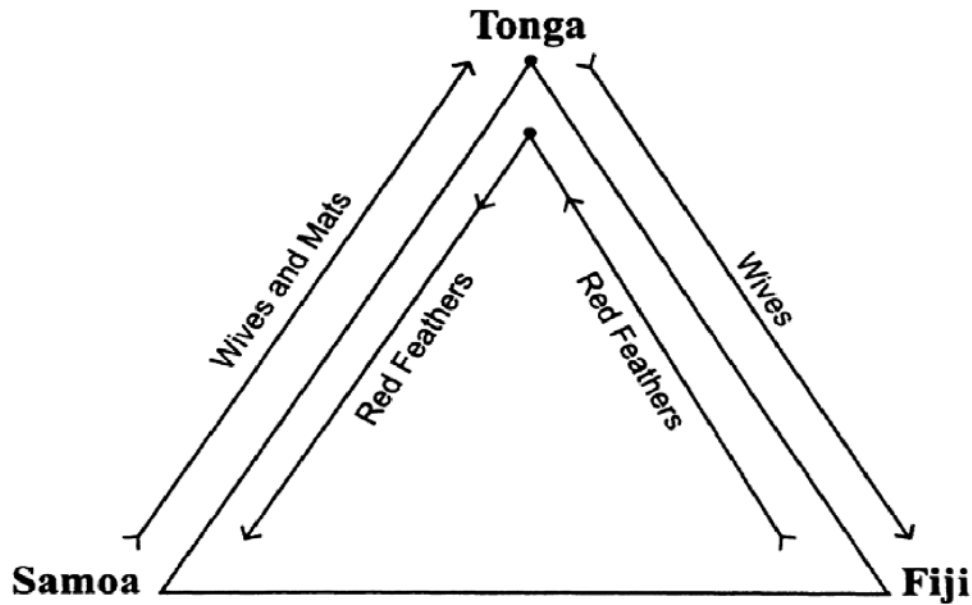
time period was not extractive in terms of the massive resource depletion or exportation of capital one attributes to other, more recent forms of nation-state dominance. Kirch (1984) explains that, given the Tongans' clout – in terms of trade items and warriors – Tongan elites could migrate away from the political center of Tongatapu, to islands such as Sāmoa or 'Uvea, and “marry into local chiefly lines and supplant the former, now conquered, autochthonous chiefs” (Kirch, 235). This provided the Tongan network “new titles... [and] opportunities for political expansion” (Aswani, 148).

Inter-island travel, trade, marriage and warfare amongst Fiji, Tonga and Sāmoa have been well documented (Kaepler 1978, Krämer 1901), and Kaepler argues that “while each [island group] is culturally distinct,” the trio “form a larger social system”. Tonga frequently ventured afar for spouses for the royal line and developed a taste for foreign travel and trade. Tonga became both the main client of and the mediator between Sāmoa and Fiji, bringing items to Sāmoa that included “Fijian parrot feathers, large sleeping mats, and Tongan barkcloth” (Kirch, 240), and can therefore be “considered the apex of a three-cornered exchange network” (Kaepler, 246).



**Figure 10. Three-cornered exchange pattern from a Sāmoan perspective (Mageo, 509).**

The most significant exchange between Tonga and Sāmoa, however, was the marrying of Sāmoan chieftesses with high-ranking Tongan males. Thus, “underlying the more overt exchanges of goods was a system of kinship relations” (Kirch, 238), whereby both Fiji and Sāmoa served as spouse-givers to Tongan paramount lineages.



**Figure 11. Three-cornered exchange pattern from a Tongan perspective (Mageo, 497).**

Sāmoan oral histories “recount a period of Tongan rule or influence that Sāmoans still refer to as the Tongan “bondage” (*pologa*)” (Linnekin, 554). In Tonga, archeological evidence for “political hierarchization – in the form of... large monument sites [for Tongan royalty] – first appear about AD 1000” (Kirch, 233), and we can assume that the Tongan Maritime Chiefdom began asserting a dominant presence upon Sāmoa in the ensuing centuries<sup>7</sup>. Krämer (1901) writes that the main Sāmoan islands of Tutuila, Upolu and Savai’i appear to have “been enslaved by the Tongans” (Krämer, 13) before 1200 AD. Here, once more, it is important to clarify that the word “slavery” in the Western lexicon implies a form of human “ownership” that is not showcased in Polynesia during this period. Thus, this term of “slavery” may serve as a placeholder for “domination”.

<sup>7</sup> Here I would like to acknowledge my emphasis on royal history over the history of everyday life as biased simply by the available historical artifacts of this time period. Apart from archeological findings, only indigenous oral histories offer accounts of this history, which also often showcase a royal bias.

Two young Sāmoan *matai* (chiefs) from Upolu – Tuna and Fata – distinguished themselves “by shaking off the yoke of the Tongans” (Krämer, 13) in the “War of Tonga in Sāmoa” (Tu’u’u, 293) around 1205 AD. Their heroism was even praised by the Tongan King, Tuitoga Tala’aifei’i, “under whose specter the yoke was cast off” (Krämer, 648), who shouted to them from the water after being driven off land: “*malie toa, malie tau!*”: “splendidly fought, brave warriors!” (Krämer, 13, Schoeffel, 180). Thus the Sāmoan paramount *matai* (chief) title “Malietoa” was born, the significance of which I shall return to in a later chapter.

Leading up to the defeat of Tongan *pologa*, indigenous political control in Sāmoa may not have been uniform. There was an attempt to monopolize power by the Sāmoan chief Tuimanu’a around 1100AD (Krämer, 11). The political influence of the Tuimanu’a title upon the Western Sāmoan islands (of Upolu and Savai’i) seems to have come to an early end, however, and was restricted to the Eastern islands of Tutuila and the aptly named Manu’a island group.

I believe that resistance to the Tongan *pologa*, paired with the inter-land opposition to an internal “ruler” of all of Sāmoa, contributed not only to the Sāmoan culture’s resilience in the face of a foreign presence attempting to assert domination and hegemony, but also resulted in a reflexively defensive cultural memory, which may underpin and help explain Sāmoa’s first few encounters with the Western world, and indeed the entire period of “post-contact” Sāmoan history. Additionally, I believe that this resistance and opposition to political centralization contributed to the formation of the decentralized and horizontally-structured nature of Sāmoan culture.

### Formation of the *Fa'aSāmoa*

Identities can be forged by periods of resistance, but these “periods” are often constructed or reinterpreted in the present to meet current needs of explanation. The interconnections of history, politics and myth can become blurred, especially when pondering the formation of the *fa'aSāmoa* (the Sāmoan Way). Obviously the *fa'aSāmoa* did not result completely from an opposition to the Tongan *pologa*, nor from inter-Sāmoan-island power struggles, but resistance played a crucial element in both the formation and resilience of the *fa'aSāmoa*.

The *'aiga* is the foundation upon which the *fa'aSāmoa* stands. Roughly translated, *'aiga* means “family”, but “Sāmoans have a much broader concept of ‘family’ than Westerners generally do” (O’Meara, 130). It would be more accurate to equate *'aiga* with a group of relatives, however closely or distantly related. Merit, status and rank are ascribed based on service to one’s *'aiga*. Although traditional Sāmoan political organization is decentralized and minimally hierarchical, within the *'aiga* there is a heavy age hierarchy. Lineage is traced matrilineally, but heads of household are almost always men.

Another important layer of the *'aiga* structure that has remained opaque to most Western descriptions is the sacredness of bond *within* an *'aiga* – a kind of horizontal hierarchy in addition to the vertical hierarchy of age and title. There are significant ties between male and female siblings – *feagaiga* – that bind sibling groups together in mutual obligation. Also, unmarried men and women play distinct roles in the life of a *'aiga* or *nu'u* (village) – as groups (*taulele'a* being the group of young men, and *aualuma* the women) – and these social groups provide a

place of identity or belonging to these unmarried men and women who, under other (Western) circumstances, might be seen as simply unattached or atomized individuals. Thus a resistance to atomization is ingrained in the Sāmoan social structure.

Each *'aiga* is represented by a set of *matai* (chiefs) at the village level *fono* (council). There are two types of *matai* titles: *ali'i* (decision-making chief) and *tulafale* (orator or talking chief). The *tulafale* speak for the *ali'i* at various gatherings, *fono*, and *fa'alavelave* (ceremonies). Of the three Sāmoan dialects – colloquial, formal and ceremonial – *tulafale* are trained in *gagana fa'aaloalo* (the orator's language of respect and honor): poetry that weaves Sāmoan mythology, imagery and metaphor.

Although not exactly elected positions, a *matai* is held accountable by his or her *'aiga*, which retains the “power to remove his [sic] title... by the overriding authority of the village council in all inter-family matters” (O'Meara, 128). The “position of the *matai* is not dictatorial”; it takes *'aiga* “consensus to achieve the title and the *matai* can lead the family only where it wants to go” (Fields, 21). Decision making, besides being communal and consensual within the *fono*, is not concentrated in individuals, but in positions, which are filled by people (*ali'i*), but even the decision-makers have someone else speak for them (*tulafale*). Thus any individual inclination towards impulsivity or autocracy is checked by being part of a larger group and identity.



**Figure 12. Example of a traditional *fale* used as a meeting house (Alexander Turnbull Library).**

The status accorded to a given *matai* title – conferred upon the title bearer for life – is based on “mythological or legendary traditions” (Holmes, 30). For example, the four paramount chiefly titles are said to be directly “descendant of the Tagaloa family of gods” (Holmes, 30). Holmes (1974) remarked that “it is a poor Sāmoan indeed who cannot claim at least one king or paramount chief as a relative” (Holmes, 30).

The *matai* system forms the basis of Sāmoan politics and land tenure. Each *matai* title is directly linked to a family’s plot of customary land, thus any change in land tenure must come from a *matai* or *fono*. However, each family’s claim to customary land is a communal claim, and private or individual land ownership in the traditional *fa’aSāmoa* is *sā* (forbidden). No individual can “alienate” land; the “power to allocate... lands reside[s] with... several branches of the family” (Linnekin, 220). The first Western impressions of the customary land tenure system, and indeed of the *fa’aSāmoa* as a whole, were that it was “communistic” (O’Meara, 128), and would prove a hindrance to any individual freedom or “development”.

Often deemed one of the most “conservative” of Polynesian cultures – in terms of a perceived hesitance or resistance to Western conceptions of “change” and “development” – the *fa’aSāmoa* has been retained better than any other Polynesian way of life. Hīroa (1930) claimed that “Sāmoans are ... more conservative than other [Polynesians] and their satisfaction with themselves and their own institutions makes them less inclined to accept the changes that foreign governments consider would be of benefit to them” (Hīroa, 5). Sāmoans did indeed appear to be culturally conservative during the colonial period; however, O’Meara (1990) posits – I believe correctly – that Sāmoan “conservatism during that era was largely a protective reaction against European incursion rather than an expression of inherently conservative forces within Sāmoan culture itself” (O’Meara, 127). Additionally, the first few Sāmoan encounters with Westerners would support Field’s (1984) claim that when “the *palagi* came over the horizon, [Sāmoans found] there was little on offer that was better than what they already had” (Field, 20).

While the historically specific ways in which religion and, later, imperialism attempted to assert dominance over the *fa’aSāmoa* are unique to Sāmoan history, I detail later that the *fa’aSāmoa* has proved the most resilient Polynesian culture in the face of imperialism and even now in “post”-colonialism. It is my belief that this resilience has come in part from the decentralized, minimally hierarchical power structure of the *fa’aSāmoa*, which may have first been formulated in opposition to the Tongan *pologa*, later inter-Sāmoan-island warfare, and further solidified during Western encroachment into Sāmoa.

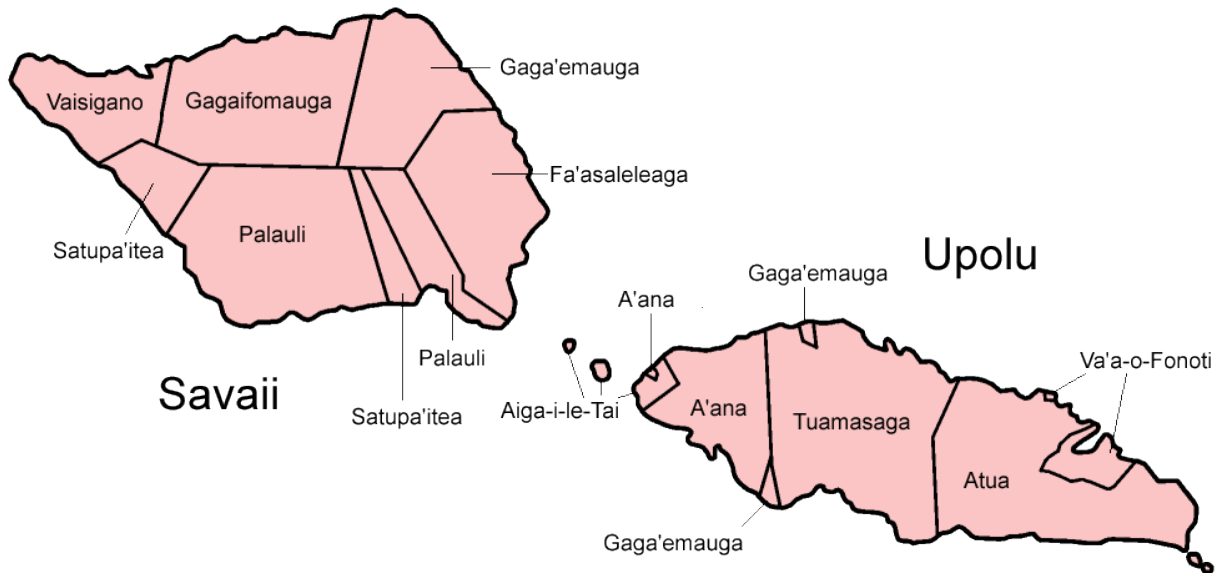
The two main islands of Savai'i and Upolu were divided into two political districts of orators. The *tulafale* of Upolu's *A'ana*, *Atua*, and *Tuamasaga* districts made up the *Tumua*. The *tulafale* from Savai'i comprised the *Pule*. Together the *Tumua* and *Pule* "manipulated elections of the high chiefly titles" and "were the acknowledged authorities on the genealogy, history and traditions of Sāmoa" (Field, 22).

Any attempt to comprehend or indeed even classify components of Sāmoan political life in *palagi* terminology – "districts", "capitals", "kings", and so forth – exemplifies clumsy Western descriptive imposition. These are approximations at best. And, just as Western attempts to discern and ultimately manipulate Sāmoan politics post-contact almost always seemed to result in heightened controversy, I argue that, in turn, Sāmoan interpretations and even misunderstandings of Western politics weigh equally in this dialectic in the other direction.

The Sāmoan islands are separated into eleven *itūmālō* (political districts), each with a capital village and *fa'avae* (constitutional foundation)<sup>8</sup>. A given district's *fa'alupega* (traditional salutations) correspond to the traditional order of title precedence within the district.

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<sup>8</sup> The eleven *itūmālō* consisted of *A'ana*, *Tuamasaga*, *Atua* (on Upolu), 'Aiga i le tai (on Manono and Apolima), *Vaisigano*, *Satupaitea*, *Gagoifomauga*, *Fa'atoafe* (Palauli), *Gaga'emauga*, *Fa'asaleleaga* (on Savai'i); *Manu'a* (on Ofu, Ta'u and Olosega). The island of Tutuila was a sub-district of *Atua*.



**Figure 13. Map delineating the eleven original *itūmālō* (adapted from Field: 1984).**

The original four most powerful titles were the TuiA’ana, TuiAtua, Gato’aitele and Tamasoali’i. And although Sāmoa has never revolved around titular supremacy, or even a centralized chiefdom, the attainment all four paramount titles could result in a Sāmoan being recognized as the *Tafa’ifā* – “the four-sided one” – the ruler of all Sāmoa. However, this feat was accomplished only a handful of times.

The first and most powerful holder of the *Tafa’ifā* title was a woman, Salamāsina. Although often depicted as Sāmoa’s first “queen”, this monarchic terminology does not perfectly apply to the history of powerful Sāmoan *matai*. Salamāsina is recounted as the most “renowned member of Sāmoan royalty [sic] remembered in oral traditions” (Barnes and Hunt, 235), and plays a central role in ancient Sāmoan history. Although Salamāsina’s ascendance to the rank of *Tafa’ifā* did not result in a completely centralized political system, “most traditions agree that Sāmoa had a royal dynasty centered on the districts of A’ana and Atua for approximately 300

years” (Meleisa, ix) after Salamāsina came into power. Although the exact date when she attained the *Tafa’ifā* title is unknown, “most genealogies place her birth around the late 15th century” (Barnes and Hunt, 236).

Field (1984) attributes the attainment of all four paramount titles to “exceptional cleverness, skill and cunning” (Field, 22). While these characteristics may indeed describe certain traits of paramount title holders throughout Sāmoan history, this description imposes a Western bias of individual political maneuvering that does not adequately or accurately describe Sāmoan politics. Salamāsina did not simply single-handedly connive her way into titular supremacy, but rather received “her paramount status precisely because of her genealogical connections to Tonga and Fiji, and even ‘Uvea” (Barnes and Hunt, 235). Natural authority was also a characteristic taken heavily into account by governing bodies of *matai* when determining title succession, and it seems undeniable that Salamāsina possessed an immense amount.

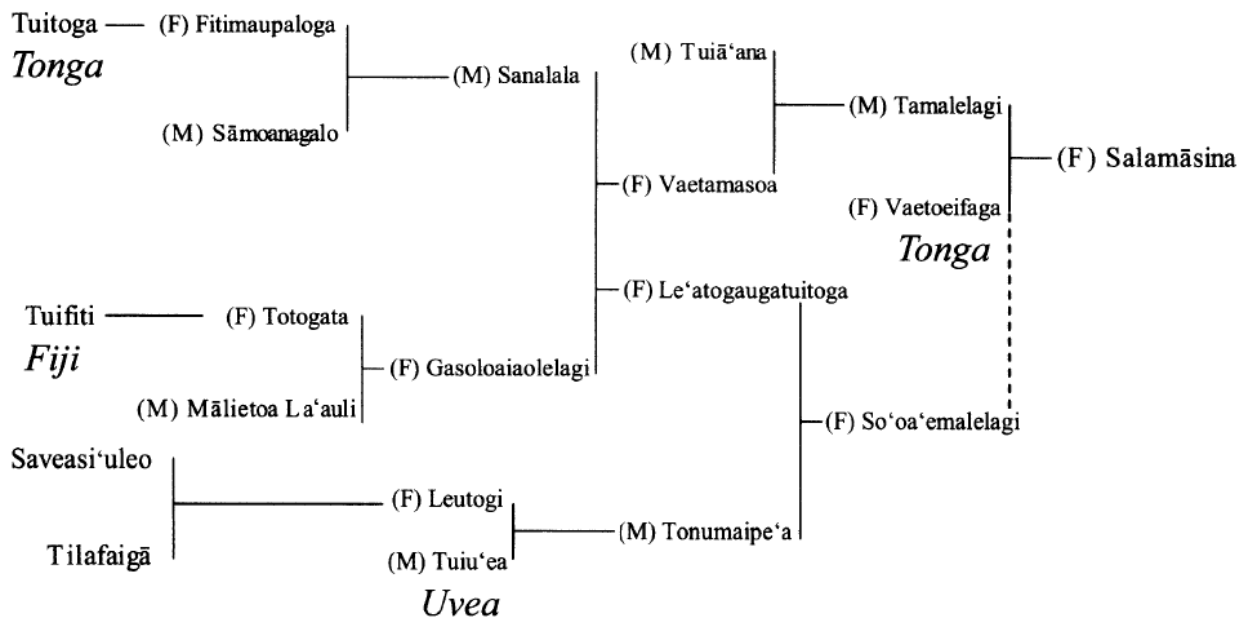
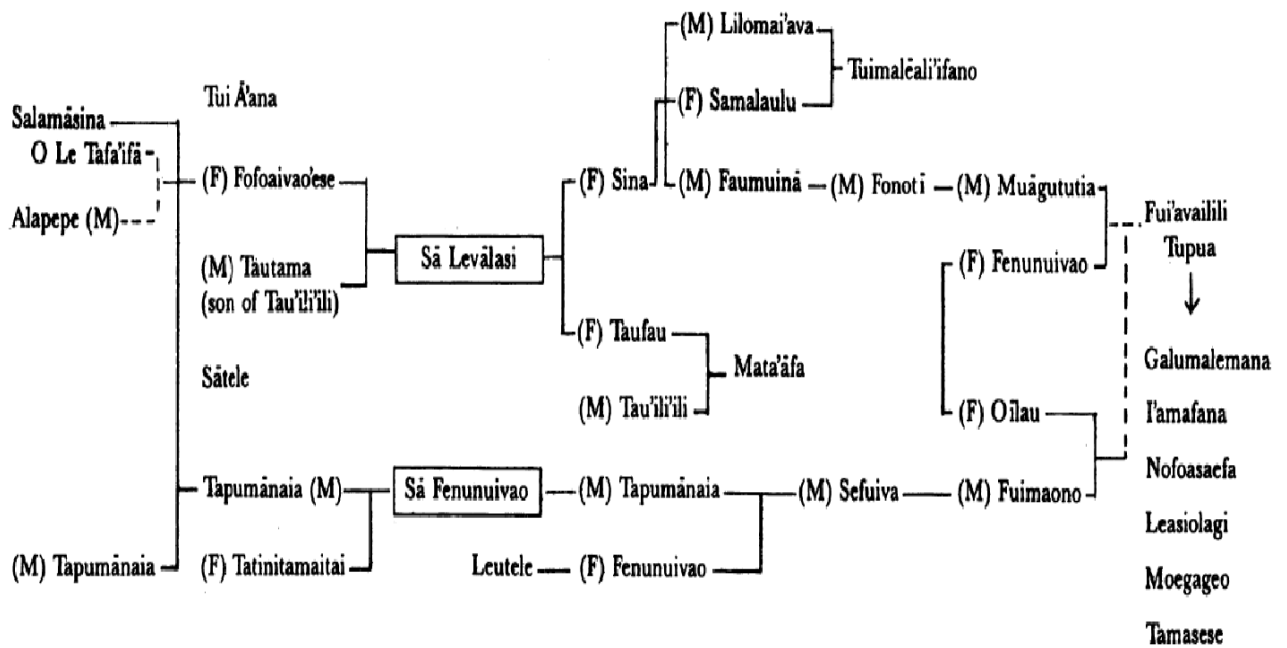


Figure 14. Abbreviated genealogy of Salamāsina (Barnes and Hunt, 235).

Salamāsina’s tripartite genealogy resulted in the most powerful lineage in Sāmoan history, and also somewhat offsets the overwhelming patriarchal history of the *matai* system. The original four paramount titles that comprised the *Tafa’ifā* evolved over time, and by European arrival, the most important titles were Mālietoa, Tupua Tamasese, Tuimaleali‘ifano and Matā‘afa (Barnes and Hunt, 235) – each corresponding to one of the four most powerful *itūmālō* – A‘ana, Atua, and the south and north of Tuamasaga (Tuimaleali‘ifano, 92)



**Figure 15. Genealogy of Salamāsina’s descendants. (Adapted from Schoeffel and Daws, 184).**

Perhaps even more important than the *Tafa’ifā* title in the telling of ancient Sāmoan political history is the distinction between the *mālō* (victors) and the *vaivai* (vanquished) political districts. High chiefs would make many marriages, and thus have many children living in

different political districts. When the *matai* died, the “leading orators of the districts would review these potential heirs in terms of the rank of their mothers, and the strength and political power of their mothers’ districts” (Meleisa, ix). The governing body of *matai* would then choose a successor. However, “each time a holder died and the... titles became vacant, the opportunity arose to alter the balance of power” (Meleisea, ix). Opposing heirs of a title would often wage war against one another, resulting in the dichotomy between the *mālō* and the *vaivai* – the gravity of which I pursue in the following chapter.

### **Fanua Tūmau**

Plots of customary Sāmoan agricultural land are divided in accordance to particular *matai* titles. In turn, *matai* titles are associated with specific families, who confer titles only through consensus. The *matai* is held accountable by the extended ‘*aiga*, while the land is held communally by the family as a whole, with the *matai* guiding decisions about land tenure. Thus, “people say that the family's lands are ‘owned’ by [a *matai*] title” (O’Meara, 138).

Traditionally, agricultural land is claimed by the “extended family whose members first cleared and planted it” (O’Meara, 138). Control over a different family’s land can only be gained “indirectly by acquiring the specific *matai* title which holds authority over those plots” (O’Meara, 138). No individual can “sell” or “alienate” customary land. Any changes in tenure must be agreed upon by the ‘*aiga*, who “reach their decisions by consensus... not by majority vote” (O’Meara, 139).

The dual pressure from the *'aiga* that hold the *matai* accountable, and the communally-held land – linked to a title, not a specific person – creates a dialectic of customary land tenure. This complexity of tenure within the *fa'āSāmoa* proved nearly incomprehensible to early colonial powers, and resulted in almost total land retention throughout the colonial period in Sāmoa. During the imperial “scramble” over Sāmoa throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, land titles became increasingly confused – a point I devote great detail to in later chapters.

## Chapter II.

### *Rethinking “Voyages of Discovery”*

#### **Against the Single-Narrative: “First Contact” as a “Meeting-Up” of Histories**

Only if we conceive of the future as open can we seriously accept or engage in any genuine notion of politics. Only if the future is open is there any ground for a politics which can make a difference (Massey, 11).

While it is crucial to recount oft-overlooked “pre-contact” history when attempting to comprehend any of Sāmoa’s “post-contact” past, the way in which we conceptualize this history – in terms of *space* and *place* – is also of utmost importance. Unfortunately, the mere *acknowledgment* that Sāmoa has a “pre-contact” past sets this telling of history apart from much Western scholarship, and may even implicitly debunk the notion that *peoples* and *places* are somehow static entities or bounded units, but I would like to devote some further attention to the

theoretical underpinnings that aided my attempt to debunk the tendency and bias towards single-narrative histories.

When thinking about *space*, Massey (2005) urges a move away from one-sided Western recounting of “voyages of discovery,” during which conquistadors and/or colonizers – always the heroes of these tales – move *across* and *conquer* space. In this paradigm, space is made to “seem like a surface; continuous and given,” and can easily lead one to believe that the people, societies or cultures found within a given space occur “simply as phenomena ‘on’ this surface” (Massey, 4).

This conception of people as “naturally occurring” in a given space deprives these people of a history of their own, and instead imposes a Western telling of history upon them. Let us not forget that Polynesians not only sailed their way to virtually almost every inhabitable Pacific Island, but even reached the coast of South America, several centuries before any Western explorer had rounded the tip of that continent (Roullier, 1). Polynesians had their own, intricate and dialectical multiplicities of trajectories prior to Western contact, which are often flattened out, ironed over, or completely omitted from a singular-narrative history.

By denying people – in our case, Sāmoans – of their own, particular historical trajectories, they are *immobilized*: lying “on space, in place” (Massey, 4), simply awaiting the arrival of Western explorers. This singular narrative “obliterates the multiplicities, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space,” and surmises that Sāmoans are “merely at an earlier

stage in the one and only narrative it is possible to tell” (Massey, 5)<sup>9</sup>. In this narrative, Sāmoans are judged in relationship to their ability to change – to jettison their indigenous culture and become as much like Westerners as possible. Here, as I begin to recount the first few encounters *between* Sāmoa and the West, I urge us to think of this past as a “meeting-up” of histories, to reject the notion that space is merely a surface, and to keep open in our imagination the possibility for a multiplicity of trajectories (Massey, 5).

As we move forward in an attempt to re-conceptualize Sāmoan history, neither from an inherently Western *nor* Sāmoan point of view, but rather from the viewpoint of the meeting-up of two histories – which, once in contact, participate in a dialectic relationship with one another – I advocate for the rethinking of history as “stories-so-far” (Massey, 8). Within this rethinking I would like to incorporate the following propositions: that we (a) “recognize space as the product of interrelations” (Massey, 8); (b) think of space as a sphere within which multiple, distinct historical trajectories exist; and (c) recognize that “space [is] always under construction... always in the process of being made... [and that] it is never finished” (Massey, 8). It is my hope that within this framework, a new and co-constituted understanding of Sāmoa may emerge – one that takes seriously the possibility of the “genuine openness of the future” (Massey, 11) – a Sāmoa that plays an active role in shaping, assimilating and manipulating encounters with foreign powers, and, in many cases, serves as an exception to the rule by defying the “inevitability” of Western and capitalist hegemony.

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<sup>9</sup> The residual evidence of conceiving history as a singular, linear trajectory can be found in early development theories, a point I will return to in a later chapter.

## The Burst Sky: First Western Contact

I would first like to unpack the origin of the Sāmoan word for European – *palagi* – as I begin to chronicle the meeting up of Sāmoan and European historical trajectories. Sāmoan cosmologies and creation myths held that the universe was shaped like “a dome, ending at the horizon” (Meleisea, 42). The Pacific islands were conceived of as a “complete universe of sea and lands, contained by the dome of the sky and divided into invisible layers containing the living places of gods” (Meleisea and Schoeffel, 119). The belief that the horizon delineated the world’s edge, “beyond which lived spirits and gods” (Meleisea and Schoeffel, 119), helps explain the origin of the Sāmoan *palagi* – or *papalagi* – which means “sky-burster” (Tent and Geraghty, 182).

Because the earth is round, as Sāmoans watched the first European ships emerge from beyond the horizon, the ships’ large sails seemed to literally break the sky open as they rose out of the sea, carrying the ships beneath them up into the field of view. The name *palagi*, however, is not necessarily Sāmoan in origin, as Sāmoans were not the first Polynesians to be visited by European explorers. Perhaps through “news of earlier contacts between Tongans and Europeans” (Schoeffel, 177), did Sāmoans have the word with which to describe these rising sails. Because Sāmoans had already heard of *palagi* encounters from neighboring Tongans, they might have thought that these “pale-skinned men who had burst in their sailing ships through the dome of heaven from another world” (Schoeffel, 177) were mortal, and not actually from the heavens.

The first *recorded* contact of a *palagi* to the Sāmoan islands was by Jacob Roggeveen’s 3-ship fleet of the Dutch West India Company, on June 14, 1722. Roggeveen and his men did not set foot ashore, but were instead greeted by Sāmoans who paddled out in their *paopao* (canoes), some of them wearing blue beads, which suggests that Roggeveen might *not* have been the first Westerner to make contact. Let us also not forget the extensive inter-island trade between Tonga, Fiji and Sāmoa (Kaepler 1978), so the beads might also have found their way to Sāmoa via trade from either Niuatoputapu or Futuna, both of which had been visited earlier by the Dutch explorers Schouten and LeMaire (Kirch, 2013).



**Figure 16. Example of a *paopao*, (Tuaopepe: 2013).**

Roggeveen wrote that Sāmoans were “the most civilized and honest of any [people] that we have seen among the islands of the South Sea” (Holmes, 16). Supposedly uninterested in trading for any of the more “sophisticated” Dutch items – such as muskets or steel – the Sāmoans traded Roggeveen a few coconuts for six rusty nails, suggesting what was later reiterated by subsequent Western explorers: that Sāmoan technology was so internally-sophisticated that only

items with perceived “exchange value,” rather than “use value,” were desired. Of course this pontification is of deeply Western prejudice, including the imposition of “value” terminology upon Sāmoan trade. Additionally, the Sāmoans’ apparent disinterest in Western material goods becomes even more confusing given later encounters with Europeans, during which Sāmoans were extremely eager to acquire trade items<sup>10</sup>.

The Sāmoan Archipelago was not visited again for another 46 years, when the French explorer Louis-Antoine de Bougainville anchored off Manu’a on May 3, 1768. Bougainville had been granted permission to attempt to circumnavigate the globe by Louis XV in 1766, and, upon successful circumnavigation, on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1769, became the first French man to sail around the world. Bougainville’s voyage was also the first complete circumnavigation that had professional naturalists and geographers aboard. One of the largest northern islands of the Solomon Archipelago was named after Bougainville and is now known as the Autonomous Region of Bougainville<sup>11</sup>.

Like Roggeveen, Bougainville was greeted by Sāmoans in their *paopao*, and he was so impressed with the Sāmoans’ boating skills that he dubbed the island chain the “Navigator Islands” (Holmes, 17) – a title that stuck in the Western lexicon for the next hundred or so years. In his view towards the Sāmoans he encountered, Bougainville was not as admiring as

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<sup>10</sup> Keesing (1934) argues that Sāmoans’ “respect for the white man and a desire for his goods were only to develop later, largely under mission influence” (Keesing, 25).

<sup>11</sup> The Autonomous Region of Bougainville was the subject of the award-winning documentary *The Coconut Revolution*, a film made by Dom Rotheroe in 2001, which tells the story of the successful uprising by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) against the Papua New Guinea army and the Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ) mining corporation. Indigenous Bougainvilleans survived a Papuan marine blockade with a myriad of inventions for self-sufficiency, most notably the use of coconut oil as a fossil fuel (Higgs, 8).

Roggeveen, and later recounted in his journal: “I do not believe that these men are so gentle as those of Tahiti; their features were more savage, and we were always obliged to be upon our guard against their cunning tricks to cheat us by their barter” (Bougainville, 280). He also reported that, once again, Sāmoans were uninterested in trading for any Western material goods such as “nails, knives, or earrings” (Holmes, 17) – all items that he had found to be in high demand in Tahiti.

The first Westerner to step foot on Sāmoan soil that we know of was another French man, Commodore Conte J.F. de G. La Perouse of the French Navy, who anchored off the coast of Tutuila on Dec. 6, 1787 (Holmes, 17). Like Bougainville, La Perouse, who was well acquainted with the published journal of Bougainville, was not specifically exploring for potential natural resource extraction – although the imperial premise under which all these expeditions were funded must never be overlooked. Among the Naval crew were ten scientists, an astronomer, a mathematician, a geologist, a botanist, a physicist, three naturalists, and three illustrators (Novaresio, 184). Before the voyage set sail, a 16-year-old Corsican boy named Napoléon Bonaparte made the preliminary crew list, but did not make the final cut due to a lack of proficiency in mathematics and artillery – both valued skills on warships (Kirk, 206).

La Perouse showed initial admiration of the Sāmoans’ “tropical affluence”, and was, like Roggeveen and Bougainville before him, surprised by Sāmoans’ apparent disinterest in iron and other Western utilities. Even when the French demonstrated the power of their musketry by shooting a few birds, Sāmoans were reportedly unimpressed and "seemed to think [the muskets] were only fit for killing birds" (Keesing, 25). La Perouse reported in his diary, “they were so

wealthy... that they despised our cloths and instruments of iron” because they were so “abundantly supplied with articles of real utility, they desired nothing but superfluities... What imagination would not conceive this delightful place the abode of felicity!” (La Perouse, 131).

On the morning of December 6<sup>th</sup>, upon going to land for drinking water, a fight broke out in the village of Fagasā between La Perouse’s men and a young Sāmoan man who had supposedly shoved one of the sailors (Holmes, 19). The French hung the man by his thumbs from one of their longboats as punishment. La Perouse viewed this incident – despite his apparent initial admiration – as only a reinforcement of his preconceived prejudice against Pacific Islanders: “my opinion concerning barbarous natives was long since fixed; and my voyage [here] has served only to confirm that opinion” (La Perouse, 131).

The next day, as the expedition was preparing to set sail away from Tutuila, La Perouse was persuaded by one of his lesser commanders, de Langle, to allow some of the crew to return ashore to collect more water. La Perouse’s decision to allow the 61 men to return to shore – “tragically ironic in hind sight” (Linnekin, 7) – resulted in his men being met on the sand by a crowd of Sāmoans that swelled, reportedly, to over 1,000. Sāmoans began throwing stones, but de Langle was apparently hesitant to return fire with French muskets. In his journal entry a few months later, La Perouse pontificated that de Langle would have “ordered a general discharge of his swivels and musketry” but, afraid of “being accused of barbarity”, “fell a victim to his humanity” (La Perouse, 139). This restraint resulted in the clubbing to death of 12 French men, including de Langle, after which the French shot and killed, by La Perouse’s estimate, 30 Sāmoans (La Perouse, 139).

Even in Sāmoan accounts of the incident, there are many conflicting arguments as to exactly why the fight broke out. One theory holds that the perpetrators of the fight were Sāmoans visiting Tutuila from the island of either Manono or Upolu (Holmes, 19, Linnekin, 18)<sup>12</sup>. Uniform support for the fight was not evident among the Sāmoans, as La Perouse reported that de Langle had attempted to trade beads with men whom he perceived to be chiefs, who were attempting to “maintain order over a crowd that was showing signs of becoming unruly” (Holmes, 19). This act of trading with only a chosen few seemed to anger the majority of the Sāmoans present on the beach, and it was supposedly at this moment that stones began to fly.

After the fight, the remaining French men made it back to their ship alive<sup>13</sup>, where the crew tacked back and forth for the next 2 days, seeking to exact vengeance. However, La Perouse was never being able to safely get within cannon range of shore without placing the ship in further danger. Further evidence to support the Tutuilans’ claim that the Sāmoan perpetrators of the fight were from a visiting party was the fact that Sāmoans paddled out to La Perouse’s ship the day after the fight and attempted to trade, “as though the previous day's incident had never happened” (Holmes, 19). This act, coupled with the fact that the dead French sailors were “buried with honors and their graves preserved” (Holmes, 19), is, in my opinion, fairly conclusive evidence that either (a) the Sāmoans engaged in the fight were from a different island, that (b) there was no uniform consensus among the Sāmoans gathered on the beach that to fight

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<sup>12</sup> This “visiting party” theory was later commonly used by missionaries to quell stigmatization of Tutuilans (Murray, 105, Linnekin, 18).

<sup>13</sup> In, 1831, upon arriving in Tutuila, the explorer Lafond de Lurcy was told that one of the men in de Langle's party had survived and was living with his Sāmoan wife and children, but did not find the French man to prove this rumor true (de Lurcy, 2, Linnekin, 18).

the French was the right decision, or that (c) the *palagi* conception that a single fight constituted the beginning of a war was not shared by the Sāmoans.

The French made it to Tonga – where they encountered or provoked no violence – to recover and refuel. In Tonga, the French crew anchored next to Captain John Hunter’s British frigate, *Sirius*. La Perouse left a copy of his journal with Hunter, who was the first to publish the accounts. La Perouse’s last entry into the journal, written in the aftermath of the “massacre,” slandered Sāmoa and Sāmoans:

This charming abode was not that of innocence ... their features announced a ferociousness not perceptible... Nature, no doubt, left this impression on the persons of these Indians, as a warning, that man, scarcely emerged from the savage state, and living in anarchy, is a more malignant being than the wildest beast (La Perouse, 131).

From Tonga, La Perouse’s two ships, the *Astrolabe* and the *Boussole*, sailed westward – and, in one of the great mysteries of maritime history, vanished. The mystery of the fate of La Perouse “was the subject of rumor, speculation, drama, poetry, and unsuccessful research for [the ensuing] 40 years” (Linnekin, 9), until, in 1827, an Irish sailor named Peter Dillon found remnants of the *Astrolabe* on the island of Vanikoro in the Solomon Islands<sup>14</sup>.

The violent encounter between the Sāmoans at Tutuila and La Perouse’s crew at Fagasā is often referred to as a “massacre” – indeed the inlet became known to Europeans as “Massacre Bay” (Holmes, 17). The term “massacre” in this case – in the Western narrative – is meant to describe the slaying of 12 French sailors, not the killing of 30 or more Sāmoans, who are, moreover, often omitted from this telling of history. La Perouse furthered the Western

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<sup>14</sup> The next year, the French mariner Dumont d'Urville confirmed that both vessels had been shipwrecked upon the reefs of Vanikoro, and that no survivors were left alive (Linnekin, 9).

conception of “ignoble savagery” when he described the Sāmoans at Fagasā as more dangerous than “the lair of a lion or tiger” (La Perouse, 140).

While the actual extent to which the “massacre” at Fagasā factored into the comparatively late subjugation to imperial powers into Sāmoa remains somewhat speculative, it is still “commonly invoked to explain the relatively late involvement of the Sāmoan islands in external trade” (Linnekin, 3). The initial, bloody encounter branded the Sāmoan people – for a time – with a violent reputation, as a “race of treacherous savages, whose shores ought not to be approached” (Turner, 3)<sup>15</sup>.

Linnekin (1991) suggests we think of the “massacre” as neither a “baseless canard” nor *the* “crucial determining factor in early Sāmoan history that later accounts have portrayed” (Linnekin, 4). I believe that the violence at Fagasā, which illustrates one of the first Sāmoan examples of “the dialectical relationship between Western Orientalist visions of Pacific Islanders and contact encounters” (Linnekin, 4), must neither be downplayed nor overly emphasized in evaluating Sāmoa’s relatively late integration into the global capitalist economy, but it certainly did contribute to a confluence of historical factors – such as geographical remoteness, historical luck and indigenous political structures – that resulted in Sāmoa’s relatively late exposure to Western religion and to the ensuing presence of imperial powers, a point I address in further detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>15</sup> For comparison, during this period, much of the South Pacific was undergoing a radical transformation that saw colonial domination of Hawaii by the 1790s, and the sculpting of Tahiti into the “metropolis of the South Pacific islands” (Gilson, 67) by 1823.

A few Western historical accounts support the claim that the altercation at Fagasā rendered the Archipelago a place to be avoided during Sāmoa’s 40 year lull in Western contact. Gunson (1978) reported that the London Missionary Society was influenced by it to *not* send missionaries to Sāmoa in 1796 and again in 1799 (Gunson, 196), and instead to establish a stronghold in Tahiti, which they had accomplished by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1829, Gilson (1970) recounts that an English mariner refused to chase after a boat full of escaped convicts headed towards Sāmoa, because “he was certain they would meet a dire fate at the hands of that desperate people” (Linnekin, 4). The Sāmoan islands received no visits of consequence during the four decades between the La Perouse affair and missionary arrival<sup>16</sup>.

The La Perouse affair is the first of many examples in Sāmoan history that offset the conception that globalization is inevitable: there is no uniformity in the flattening of space and time by the spread of global capital, and local contestations – in this case, violence – have the power to alter, dissuade and even delay the encroachment of Western expansion.

Finally, before beginning the history of Western, imperial and colonial presence in Sāmoa in earnest, I would like to briefly pause to reflect on the multiplicities of history: the subtle twists that contribute to current conjunctures; in other words, the “what ifs”. What if the yolk of the Tongan Maritime Chiefdom had not been thrown off and the Tongan *pologa* had persisted? What if the formulation of the *fa’aSāmoa* had resulted in a more hierarchical or centralized indigenous political system? What if there had not been a single drop of blood spilled on the sands of Fagasā? What if Napoléon had been better at math?

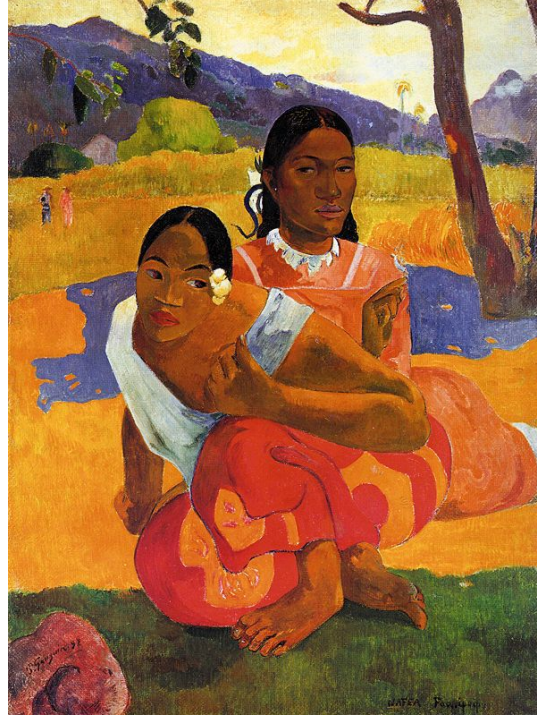
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<sup>16</sup> Captain Edward Edwards stopped in Sāmoa in 1790 during his search for the *Bounty* mutineers. Edwards reported that the Sāmoans who boarded his ship were so friendly that he had great difficulty departing (Holmes, 18).

## Chapter III.

### *The Kingdom Came From Heaven*

The relatively late arrival of Western religion to Sāmoan shores must be understood in terms of reputation, fear, racism, and, perhaps most importantly, relational geography. Many of the first Western explorers to reach Sāmoa had already passed through Tahiti, so Tahitians became the backdrop against which Sāmoans were compared, through a Western lens. Eighteenth Century Westerners constructed Tahitians as the “archetype of the noble savage or the ‘soft’ primitive, the artless sensualist surviving with little effort amidst Eden-like plenty” (Linnekin, 5).



**Figure 17. Paul Gauguin, the famous French Post-Impressionist artist, moved to Tahiti in 1895 and greatly contributed to the construction of Polynesians – especially Tahitians – as “soft primitives” through his series of pastoral paintings of Tahitian women (Foster, 1993).**

Upon “first contact,” the general Western consensus about Sāmoans was that they were a much less gentle, submissive or easily moldable race than Tahitians. Western proclamations such as Bougainville’s: “I do not believe that these men [Sāmoans] are so gentle as those of Tahiti; their features were more savage” (Bougainville, 280), coupled with the aftershocks of the La Perouse affair, gave Sāmoans a reputation as a people to be avoided.

Thus, Sāmoa’s reputation, combined with its geographic remoteness from main trade routes – particularly in relation to Tahiti, which lay at the heart of South Pacific imperial traffic – prompted the first missionaries in the Pacific to prolong departures to Sāmoa, and to focus their efforts instead on Tahiti.

Meanwhile, during the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as the scene was being set for the Industrial Revolution, England had been undergoing radical social change that transformed education, factories and prisons. While the break-down and restructuring of the English classes is one of the most compelling aspects of early European capitalist development, here I wish only to note that “the British lower classes who worked as skilled labor would be the first to reach the [Pacific] islanders and prepare [them] for religious conversion” (Alofaitulu, 43). English missionary work provided an outlet for members of the English proletariat, as well as members of the aristocracy disenfranchised by primogeniture laws – under which only the first-born son could inherit anything, often leaving the younger sons, not to mention unmarried daughters, aimless, belittled, and poor.

The London Missionary Society was established in England in 1795 out of a confluence of several non-denominational lines of the Anti-Slavery Society. Whereas Captain Cook reached Hawaii under the auspices of *both* religion and imperial resource extraction, the first LMS missionaries to reach Tahiti in 1797 on the *Duff* were “blue collar,” and seemingly earnest in their desire of conversion only.

In 1797, the LMS successfully converted the Tahitian king, Pōmare (Holmes, 18), and established the first Congregational mission in the South Pacific under the king’s sanction. The aforementioned conscious political decision *not* to send missionaries to Sāmoa in 1796 and 1799 (Gunson, 196), meant that the LMS did not send their first dispatch to Sāmoa until 1830. By then, a solid foundation had been established in Tahiti from which to venture deeper into the Pacific.

We have discussed how the West constructs “others” as static beings who exist only once “discovered”. But this dynamic works the other way as well – which itself complicates the dialectic. The first *palagi* missionaries to reach Sāmoa arrived on their own trajectory of history, the result of centuries of their own complex social development, utterly distinct from the development of Polynesia. These *palagis* did not simply appear out of nowhere, from the broken sky, although it might have appeared that way to Polynesians upon first contact. The very word *palagi* – “*pa*” meaning to break, and “*le lagi*”: the sky or the heavens (from seeing the first ships in full sail appear slowly over the horizon, as if tearing open the sky in advance of the ships themselves) – shows Sāmoans, from their own perspective, fixing Europeans in time and space: constructing them as a static, two-dimensional other. The dialectic works both ways.

### **Ancient Sāmoan Spirituality: *Lotu Fa’aleagāga***

Prior to the introduction of Christianity, the *fa’aSāmoa* revolved around not only the ‘*aiga*, but around a set of mythology-laden spiritual principles, under which “spirituality [was maintained] at a high level” (Alofaitulu, 38). Each ‘*aiga*, *nu’u* (village) or *pulega* (sub-district), “would venerate particular living organisms as gods (Alofaitulu, 36). Beings such as eels, turtles and trees were common animate objects, while inanimate objects included “shells, stones, the moon, the stars, and clouds” (Alofaitulu, 38). Objects were even venerated at an individual level, with Sāmoans assigned personal deities they would associate themselves with throughout their life. Turner (1861) recorded that: “a man would eat freely as what was regarded as the incarnation of the god of another man, but the incarnation of his own particular god he would consider it death to injure or eat” (Turner, 17).

The highest class of gods within the original *fa'aSāmoa* were the *Atua*, who dwelled in the heavens. *Tagaloa-a-lagi* was the most powerful *Atua* – the Supreme Being that created the “peace and harmony that held the balance” (Alofaitulu, 38)<sup>17</sup>. Next, deified spirits of past chiefs comprised the *Tupua* class of gods. Village and family-level gods, called *aitu*, were thought to embody specific aspects of life, such as war or fertility. There was also an inferior class of spirits known as *sauali'i* that brought sickness or discontent<sup>18</sup>.

In the traditional lore of the *fa'aSāmoa*, different family claims to *matai* titles were seen as “supernatural sanctions” that were “reckoned to have come direct from the gods themselves” (Keesing, 400). The spiritual component of the *fa'aSāmoa* was intimately tied to both the political and social organization of village life. This spiritual and village structure will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, as it is my argument that adaptation of Christianity into the pre-existing power structure of the *fa'aSāmoa* was key to early success of conversion. However, throughout my examination of the spread of Christianity in Sāmoa, I have strived to keep in mind that “different evaluations of Christianity's legacy are sensible if we recognize that interpretations of the past are always made in the present and respond to the contemporary context” (Linnekin, 213).

### *Lotu Taiti*

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<sup>17</sup> *Atua* is now the Sāmoan word for the Christian “God”.

<sup>18</sup> These terms are still in everyday use and consciousness. *Aitu* are spirits, or ghosts, and illness is still brought on by *sauali'i*.

Tongan Wesleyan Methodists arrived in Sāmoa in 1828 (Keesing, 396); however, the mission's commitment to Sāmoa was minimal, with only two Tongan converts sent to Savaii (Holmes, 18)<sup>19</sup>. Given the intricate history between Tonga and Sāmoa, it would be safe to say that Sāmoans who came into contact with these first Tongan converts would have been wary. However, and perhaps ironically, it was partly because Sāmoans were already familiar with Tongans that these first Polynesian proxy missionaries were successful. The Tongans were more savvy to Sāmoan culture than any *palagi* and knew how best to introduce their new form of religion<sup>20</sup>.

On August 24, 1830, the head of the LMS in the Pacific, John Williams, reached the north coast village of Sapapāli'i on Savai'i in the brigantine *Messenger of Peace*. Historical records portray different accounts of who Williams brought with him – whether it was two Tongan converts and two Tahitian converts, or six Tahitians and two Aituakians (Holmes, 18, Alofaitulu, 35) – but all records confirm that Williams was accompanied by one other white missionary, Charles Barff, a Sāmoan guide named Faueā, and his wife Puaseiese.

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<sup>19</sup> Methodists had succeeded by 1827 in converting the Tongan king, Tu'i Josiah Tupou Kanokupolu. Several Tongans married Sāmoans and settled on the south coast of Savai'i in 1828, securing a small following for the new religion.

<sup>20</sup> Headed by Joel Tupou of Tonga, these Wesleyans became known as the *Lotu Tonga*, and later established a mission on the small island of Manono (Meleisea, xi).



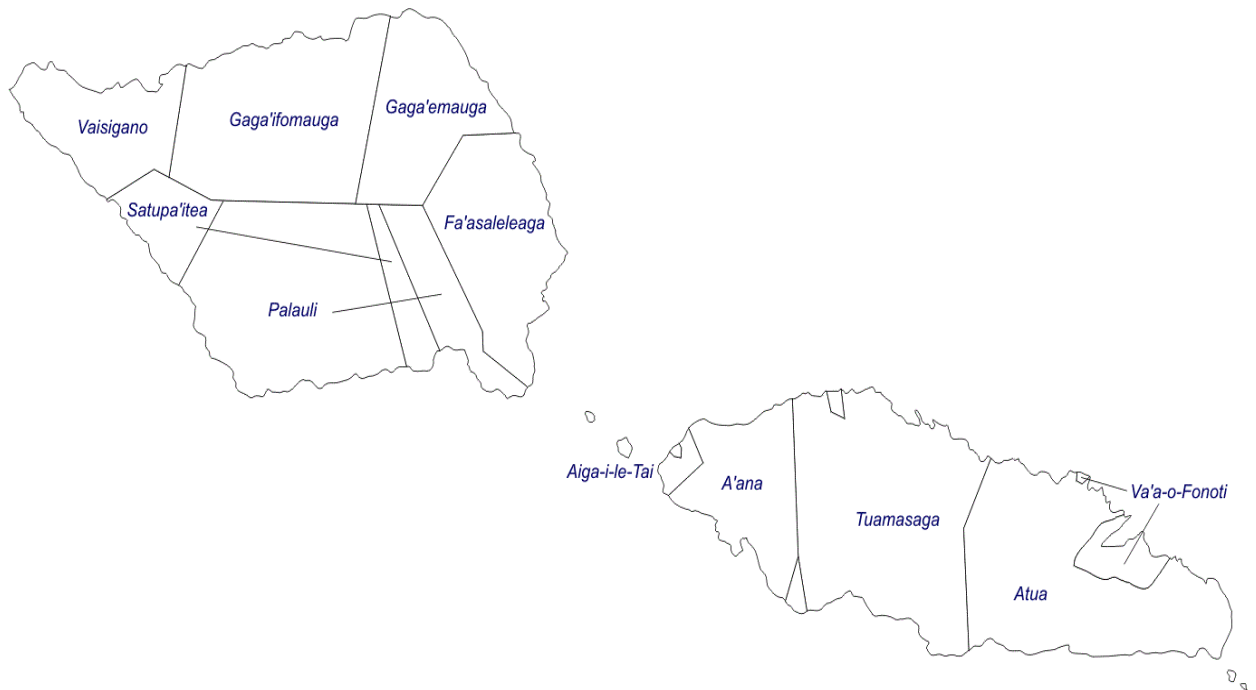
**Figure 18. Illustrated portrait of John Williams (Alexander Turnbull Library).**

Before detailing the spread of Christianity in Sāmoa, I would like to draw on a famous Sāmoan oral tradition. One of the most powerful *tupua* deities was Nāfanua, the goddess of War. After a war over an important *matai* title in the 1700s, Nāfanua was said to have given the *mālō* (governance) and titles to the powerful district of A’ana and its allies. A high chief, Malietoa Fitisemanu, prayed to Nāfanua for a portion of the *mālō*, to which she responded “that she had already given that *mālō* away, but... uttered the following prophetic statement: *E tali i lagi lou mālō*, your kingdom will come from heaven” (Alofaitulu, 38). Williams’ *Messenger of Peace* arrived at Fitisemanu’s village of Sapapāli’i two generations later, and “many interpreted [Williams’ arrival] as fulfillment of the prophecy to the Malietoa family” (Alofaitulu, 38). – none more than Malietoa Vainu’upō<sup>21</sup>, one of Fitisemanu’s direct descendants in Sapapāli’i.

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<sup>21</sup> The literature recognizes two spellings of Malietoa’s name: Vai’inupō and Vainu’upō. I have chosen to use Vainu’upō, as it is used more frequently, and by most texts written by native Sāmoans.

Prior to Williams’s arrival, the War of A’ana had been raging among islanders of Manono, Upolu and Tutuila. Historically, Upolu’s A’ana district had the strongest *mālō*, and was governed by the powerful Tupua family. After I’amafana Tupua’s death, a priest of the war goddess Nāfanua, Leiataua Tamafaiga, temporarily claimed all four paramount titles, but was assassinated shortly thereafter. Malietoa Vainu’upō then waged war against A’ana to avenge the death of Leiataua Tamafaiga, his close relative. Vainu’upō’s faction, “which comprised the allied districts of Savai’i and Tuamasaga, conquered A’ana and drove most of its inhabitants off their lands to become refugees with their allies in the district of Atua” (Meleisea, x).



**Figure 19. Map indicating the most powerful *itūmālō* during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (Adapted from Field, 1984).**

Vainu'upō thus became *Tafa'ifā* and was also declared *O Le Pule o Salafai'i* “by the leading orators of Safotulafa'i” (Meleisea, x) – a title created at this time to mark the conquest of Savai'i and 'Aiga-i-le-tai over A'ana and Atua. This confluence of I'amafana's death, the end of the War of A'ana, and the elevation of Vai'inupo to the status of *Tafa'ifā*, coincided within a week of the LMS arrival. Given Nāfanua's prophetic statement, this seemingly supreme conjuncture resulted in Vai'inupo's becoming the most powerful *matai* in all of Sāmoa.

Williams's Sāmoan guide, Faueā, advised the *Messenger of Peace* to first anchor off the coastal village of Sapapāli'i. Faueā – who had lived in Tonga and Fiji for the previous ten years – was not a chiefly man “by status, but his blood ties to... Malietoa Vainu'upō” surely prompted him to advise Sapapāli'i as a suitable first village, and “ensured an easy acceptance of the new religion” (Alofaitulu, 37)<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, Vainu'upō welcomed the missionaries with ceremonial gifts and a kava ceremony, promising to “protect the native teachers Williams left under his patronage” (Linnekin, 18)<sup>23</sup>. In a calculated move, Vainu'upō embraced the LMS, using his new powers as *Tafa'ifā* to help the church quickly gain national recognition. The arrival of the LMS lent credent to Vainu'upō's own power via the prophecy. His investment in promoting these white newcomers as bringers of the foretold, new and all-powerful *mālō*, directly increased his political sway – and, what is more, he may even have believed the prophecy.

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<sup>22</sup> For unclear reasons, Faueā had been exiled to Tonga. However, upon returning to Sāmoa with Williams, he was bestowed with the *ali'i* title of Mulipola from the village of Salua on Manono in 1843.

<sup>23</sup> Williams left eight converts with Vai'inupo, to “place where he chose” (Linnekin, 213).

Although slightly predated by the arrival of Tongan Wesleyans, Reverend John Williams can be seen as the main bearer of Christianity to Sāmoa, as the LMS<sup>24</sup> has played the dominant role in Sāmoan religious life since its introduction. Williams, however, did not settle in Sāmoa until 1832<sup>25</sup>, opting to return to Tahiti, which in effect afforded Sāmoans an additional two years of exposure to Western religion, without the presence of a white missionary.

In comparison with many other countries which experienced religious imposition, “at least superficially, Christianity made an easy conquest in Sāmoa” (Linnekin, 18). However, the transitional period “was not without its strains and stresses” (Keesing, 401). It was in fact not the seamless, uncontested nor immediate transformation portrayed in many Western accounts of Sāmoan history. In a letter, Williams reported that:

The chiefs of the different settlements held meeting after meeting to consult upon the propriety of changing the religion of their ancestors and the case was argued on both sides with a calmness that seldom characterizes debates in more civilized [sic] countries and with an acuteness that does credit to their senses (Moyle, 237).

Additionally, many villages reportedly “held out for years against the new religion, and indeed the missionaries were hard put at times to prevent open warfare between their converts and the ‘Devil men’” (Keesing, 401). As Christianity’s roots dug deeper into Sāmoa, new converts eager to distinguish themselves from the “Devil men” partook in various acts of

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<sup>24</sup> The LMS quickly became known by Sāmoans as the *Lotu Taiti*, or Tahitian Church, as many of the first LMS missionaries were Tahitian converts (Meleisea, xi).

<sup>25</sup> This same year, the French explorer Dumont D’Urville, upon exploration of the South Pacific, replaced the old categories of Near and Remote Oceania with: Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. These categories are still used today in the Western lexicon; however, Polynesia is the only category that coherently fits with a geographic, cultural or linguistic group. Melanesia, named after “melanin” for the islanders’ dark skin, and Micronesia – “micro” for small island size – have proved to be sweeping and racist categorizations (Green 1991).

spectacle during which they ate or destroyed their personal deified animate and inanimate objects which embodied their “guardian spirits” (Keesing, 401).

The consensus among many Sāmoan *and* Western accounts is that (far from a disdain for *palagi* goods attributed to Sāmoans by early explorers,) a perceived superiority of Western material goods by Sāmoans was key to their conversion to Christianity. There are several records of different village *matai* claiming that “the God who gave them all things must be good and that his religion must be superior to ours. If we receive and worship him he will in time give us all these things as them” (O’Meara, 127). Keesing (1934) cites a record of a *matai* – presumably from Sapapāli’i, or a neighboring village on Savai’i – as pronouncing:

I look at the wisdom of these worshippers of Jehovah, and see how superior they are in every respect. Their ships can traverse the tempest-driven ocean for months with perfect safety. Their persons also are covered from head to foot in beautiful clothes. Their axes are so hard and sharp .... Their knives, too, what valuable things they are .... Now I conclude that the God who has given to His white worshippers these valuable things must be wiser than our gods, for they have not given the like to us. We all want these articles; and my proposition is, that the God who gave them should be our God (Keesing, 396).

### **Dialectics and the Assimilation of Religion**

Christianity and the *fa’aSāmoa* were, from the onset, in a dialectical relationship with one another, a relationship that resulted in Sāmoans readily adapting the religion into a unique and authentically Sāmoan form of Christianity. Instead of a top-down imposition, or a one-way dynamic in which the LMS simply transmitted Christianity upon a static and immobilized Sāmoa, the new religion was molded, dialectically and syncretically, to the pre-existing indigenous power structure and value system of the *fa’aSāmoa*.

Williams’s “own receptivity to the advice of a native convert” (Linnekin, 213) – Faueā – was of crucial significance. In Williams’s writings about Faueā, there is not the “same degree of superiority and denial of approval that is evident in the writings” (Linnekin, 213) of other missionaries in the Pacific during this period. Faueā advised Williams to be careful not to prohibit too many Sāmoan customs immediately, “lest in the very onset [Sāmoans] should conceive a dislike to the religion which imposed such restraints” (Linnekin, 215). Faueā instead argued for a gradual approach, urging the white missionaries to “be diligent in teaching the people ... and they themselves will put away that which is evil” (Williams, 310). Thus, the LMS attempted to make nominal conversion as easy as possible, “marking many practices for eventual proscription but meeting the [Sāmoans’] enthusiasm for Christianity with a superficial tolerance of sin [sic]” (Gilson, 372)<sup>26</sup>.

In addition to Faueā’s familial ties to Vai’inupo, he was also a persuasive missionary in his own right, using his personal clout as a Sāmoan to tout Western material goods, and to use these as evidence of the superiority of the Christian religion. In one of Faueā’s first proclamations, Williams recorded him exclaiming:

can the religion of these wonderful [*palagi*] be anything but good and wise? Let us look at them and then look at ourselves; their heads are covered, while ours are exposed to the heat of the sun, and the wet of the rain; their bodies are clothed all over with beautiful cloth, while we have nothing but a bandage of leaves around our waist; they have clothes upon their very feet, while our are like dogs; and then look at their axes, their scissors, and their other property; how rich they are! (Williams, 86).

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<sup>26</sup> Eventually, missionaries did attempt to prohibit certain Sāmoan practices among their converts, such as “tattooing and the exchange of goods at marriage” (Linnekin, 213) – without success.

In detailing his gradualist, yet still blatantly racist approach to introducing the new religion, Williams wrote that after a time Malietoa Vainu'upō – who changed his name to Malietoa Tavita in 1836, after King David of Israel (Meleisea, x) – asked him all that was *sā* (forbidden) in Christianity, and Williams said, “I informed him that there were very many things the evil of which they would see as soon as they were a little more enlightened... I then referred to war, revenge, adultery, theft, lying, cheating, their obscene dances and many of their pastimes” (Williams, 376). Williams was not able to simply impose a one-sided, top-down transmission of the “good word,” just as Sāmoans did not completely dictate the terms of their conversion. Through this meeting up of spiritual tenets – the give and take between the two trajectories – the “Sāmoanization of Christianity” emerged.

By 1837, the LMS had successfully constructed seven missions in Sāmoa, primarily on Savai'i and Upolu. Before the turn of the decade, “twelve white L.M.S. missionaries had settled in [Sāmoa]” (Keesing, 396)<sup>27</sup>. After 1840, there were a few minor wars, but much of the inter-district violence was “quickly contained by the new spirit of Christian pacifism and... [Vainu'upō's] chiefly decree against war” (Meleisea, xi).

Vainu'upō apparently took the *sā* tenets of Christianity to heart, and “allowed the people of A'ana to return to their lands as a gesture of Christian peace” (Meleisea, x). Lastly, prior to his death in 1841, Vainu'upō declared in his *mavaega* (will or death proclamation) that he

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<sup>27</sup> In 1839, the American explorer Charles Wilkes visited Tutuila, Upolu and Savai'i. In Upolu, Wilkes met with John Williams's son, John C. Williams, and appointed him as a “consul to represent American interests in Sāmoa and to work with local chiefs in guaranteeing protection for the American whaling fleet” (Holmes, 20). However, this position of consul was never actually confirmed by the United States government. Later, in 1844, Williams Jr. was “officially named to the post of commercial agent for the United States” (Holmes, 20), but this post was limited to Tutuila and the Manu'a island group, thus not affecting Sāmoa proper.

desired the ultimate *mālō* to be given to his new god, and returned the four paramount titles to their respective districts. It was his hope that by dissolving the most-central power of the *Tafa'ifā*, a new peace would be brought to Sāmoa.

Before reaching Sāmoa, after roughly 12 years in Tahiti, Williams had spent several months in Rarotonga, where he successfully converted many Rarotongans and learned their language. It was there that he constructed his 60-foot *Messenger of Peace*, out of tropical hardwood. Williams returned to Britain briefly in 1834, where he supervised the printing of his translation of the new testament into the Rarotongan language. On this trip home, Williams brought a Sāmoan convert, Leota, who later died in London and was buried in Abney Park Cemetery with a dignified headstone. The Sāmoan language had first been translated into a written form by the LMS in 1834, and upon Williams's return with the newly translated Rarotongan Bible, the first Bible written in Sāmoan was completed, using the Rarotongan version as a model. In 1844, the LMS established the Malua Theological Seminary to train young Sāmoan *faiife'au*, where students studied and read the Bible in Sāmoan.

Given the success of conversion, Williams left his family in Sāmoa, and in 1839 departed for the island of Erromango in Vanuatu – where, upon arrival, he was promptly killed. The timing of Williams's arrival was of utmost misfortune, since just a few days previous, many Erromangans had been killed in a fight with British traders, and Erromangans saw Williams as a related threat. The Erromangans who killed Williams practiced ritualistic cannibalism, and they ate Williams in the hopes of vanquishing the spirit of Western incursion into their island. Upon hearing this news, a group of Sāmoan converts traveled to Erromango and brought Williams's

remains back to Apia, where they now rest under a monument in the Congregational Christian Church of Apia<sup>28</sup>.



**Figure 20. A painting by George Baxter, portraying the “barbarous” Erromangans killing Williams, fueling the Western construction of South Pacific Islanders as “ignoble savages” (Alexander Turnbull Library).**

### Sāmoanization of the Church

The LMS had first hoped to promote political centralization, believing conversion would be easier under a united body politic. However, the LMS was quickly foiled by the nature of Sāmoan politics, realizing “that sovereignty was possessed by a people collectively” (Field, 22). Sāmoans insisted on retaining local control of their churches, and the LMS gave up trying to centrally govern the “the multitude of virtual village republics” (Field, 22). But perhaps most important to understanding the success of and enduring role of Christianity in “post-contact” Sāmoan history is the assimilation of church roles into the *fa’aSāmoa*. Out of the dialectical

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<sup>28</sup> Erromango was then dubbed “Martyr’s Island” in the Western lexicon. In 2009, through a collaboration between the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, and leaders in Vanuatu, Williams’s descendants travelled to Erromango for a ceremony of reconciliation. The place of Williams’s death, Dillon’s Bay, was renamed Williams Bay to mark the reconciliation (Leyland, 2009).

relationship between the LMS and the *fa'aSāmoa* “developed a remarkably complete system based more or less on the old political divisions of Sāmoan life” (Keesing, 406).

The way in which Christianity was assimilated did not shake the foundations of the “existing social organization and [prepare] the way for sweeping changes in the whole cultural setting of the native life” (Keesing, 400), as was the case in Hawaii and Tahiti. Instead, Sāmoan *matai* and *tulafale* (orators) shifted metaphors, by switching from “one set of interpretations... without any vital blow being struck at the fundamentals of the existing order” (Keesing, 400). Implementation of new, Christian taboos such as the “observance of the Sabbath and the new moral precepts of Christianity were readily accepted as they replaced old taboos of equal severity” (Watters, 397).

Each village constructed its own church, headed by a Sāmoan *faife'au* (pastor). The church was controlled by a *fono* (council) of *matais*, who took on the additional role of elected deacons within the church. Groupings of villages made up a *pulega* (sub-district), and three or four *pulega* made up a church district. Each *pulega* was governed by a council called the *tofiga*, made up of a wide swath of *faife'au* and *matai*. Each full district had a “representative body” (Keesing, 406) called the *tofiga tele*.

The *matai* and *tulafale* kept their traditional roles, identities and positions, while the newly constructed position of *faife'au* was woven into this social matrix. Sāmoans also exhibited “tremendous zeal” (Keesing, 401) for their village churches, and their “enthusiastic sectarianism” (Linnekin, 216) could be seen as yet another expression of local rivalries. Priestly functions became woven into the pre-existing roles of the *matai* and the *tulafale*. As elected

deacon of the church, it became the duty of each family's *matai* to conduct the nightly prayer service “which has become an essential part of Sāmoan household life” (Keesing, 400).

Thus, church political organization was molded to fit with the pre-existing, decentralized, and minimally hierarchical structure of the *fa'aSāmoa*. Also of utmost importance, many “of the basic tenets of ancient *fa'aSāmoa* fit well with Christianity” (Alofaitulu, 37), such as *alofa* (mercy or love), *tautua* (selfless service), *fa'amāgalo* (forgiveness) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect)<sup>29</sup>. (Today, although most Sāmoans would identify themselves as both Christian and literate, ancient mythology and traditional spirit lore remains concurrent in the cultural psyche). The church has evolved to play a more vital role in Sāmoan society than any institution other than the *'aiga*, enjoying a central position in all aspects of Sāmoan life – social, economic, or political (Gullenstrup).

### **Prepared Entry?**

How Christianity was introduced, assimilated and reproduced at the local level in Sāmoa is key to understanding whether Williams and the LMS should be viewed as having “prepared entry” for subsequent Western imperial powers. Although John Williams and other white LMS missionaries identified as simply “men of God,” setting out to save as many souls as possible, these early missionaries were key political players in Sāmoa's gradual exposure to the Western world, but Sāmoa's accommodation of imperialism followed a unique trajectory.

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<sup>29</sup> It is important not to romanticize the political structure of the *fa'aSāmoa*, which is traditionally very patriarchal. It has been rare for women to hold *matai* titles – although this has recently been changing – and there are still no women *fa'ife'au*. According to Keesing's (1934) account, there was no “basic difference between the patriarchal system of the Old Testament, and the *matai* organization” (Keesing, 400).

By the time Williams had established himself in Sāmoa, he was, because of his work in Tahiti, already the most influential missionary in the South Pacific. Williams and the LMS can be seen as Sāmoa's first, sustained imperial presence. Their automatic assumption of material, intellectual, cultural and spiritual superiority to Sāmoans erased “multiplicities of trajectories” and made them see Sāmoa, as Lefebvre (1974) would say, as “abstract space” to be moved across and conquered, or, in their eyes, “saved”. This “production of space” laid the foundation for subsequent, more blatantly imperial powers which arrived later in Sāmoa.

This was the case throughout the Pacific. Linnekin (1991) details, for example, how early white missionaries in Hawaii played a “major role as interpreters and informants for the explorers of the 1830s” (Linnekin, 18). The situation in Sāmoa, however, was distinctly different, because, while Christianity was indeed an imperial presence, and the LMS may have seen themselves as “civilizing” the “backward” and “savage” Sāmoans, the Sāmoanization of Christianity and the Christianizing of Sāmoan power struggles paradoxically impeded the *linear* development of imperialism in Sāmoa.

After Vainu'upō liquidated his power as *Tafa'ifā* in the hopes of bringing about a new peace to Sāmoa, new, heightened titular disputes broke out. Given the Sāmoans' assimilation of the Christian tenet against war, “there was no distinct victor, no clearly established *mālō* or *vaivai*” (Meleisea, xi). The traditional Sāmoan order was disrupted, causing inter-titular disputes to rage on through the end of the century. These disputes, later agitated, encouraged and even constructed by different European factions vying for power, proved a “hindrance to development” – *from the palagi perspective*. Thus, the introduction of Christianity not only

equipped Sāmoans with the theoretical lens through which to view imperialism as “un-Christian”, it disrupted the cycle of the *mālō* and *vaivai* so that political centralization and ensuing domination by a *palagi* power was virtually impossible for the next century.

Keesing (1934) pointed out that early missionary objectives in Sāmoa were often “very different from and have often run counter to those of the trader... even to some extent of the official, so that a certain conflict has emerged” (Keesing 404). The first missionary and imperial powers in Sāmoa were *not* synonymous, as they were in places like Hawaii (Linnekin, 208). Thus, Sāmoa did not have to deal with the imposition of religion, natural resource extraction and attempted hegemonic domination all at the same time. Perhaps most ironically, because Sāmoans took to heart the core teachings of Christianity, by the time imperial powers in earnest arrived, Sāmoans were able to view these forces as counter to a true Christian impulse, which for Sāmoans at this time evoked compassion, generosity and fairness.

Christianity’s success in Sāmoa can be attributed to the astonishing conjuncture of Nāfanua’s prophecy; Malietoa Vainu’upō’s status as *Tafa’ifā*; Faueā’s familial ties to Vainu’upō and the village of Sapapāli’i; and the spiritual fabric of the *fa’aSāmoa*. Also, the relatively late, and staggered nature of arrival of missionaries in Sāmoa – initially by Polynesian proxies – and the fact that missionary and imperial powers were *not* synonymous, afforded Sāmoans enough time to not only hear about some of the brutal effects religious imposition had had in places like Tahiti and Hawaii – making the Samoans justifiably wary of Western religion – but then later allowed them both the time and perspective to assimilate the pieces of Christianity – both

structural and spiritual – that best fit with the *fa'aSāmoa*, and not suffer the loss of culture as collateral.

## **Chapter IV.**

### ***The Old Firm and The Old Party***

Whereas the islands of Hawaii and Tahiti sit at the confluence of active trade routes, Sāmoa is in the middle of the huge South Pacific Ocean, en route to few destinations of military or commercial importance to imperial powers. Sāmoa also lacks any natural resource valuable

enough for imperial powers to go the extra mile – literally – to procure it, let alone fight over it<sup>30</sup>. This relational geography, lack of niche resources and the reputation of Sāmoans as a people to be avoided, resulted in Sāmoa being seen as simply an island chain for refueling food and water on a long ocean voyage headed somewhere else (Smitz, 31). Nonetheless, Sāmoa still did not withstand the imperial scramble in the Pacific unscathed. Linnekin (1991) rightly argues that “indigenous cultural and political structures dialectically interact with particular agents of colonialism” (Linnekin, 205). This argument could not be more fitting for Sāmoa, where “local articulations with capitalism were strikingly [more] variable” (Linnekin, 206) than other Polynesian societies that experienced imperial incursion. Sāmoa’s initial encounter with, subsequent resistance to, and dialectic interaction with, Western capitalism demonstrate that “capitalism did not expand monolithically or uniformly, even within a single geographical region” (Linnekin, 209).

In 1842, the United States began a “lively trade in coconut oil” (Holmes, 20) on the eastern Sāmoan island of Tutuila, but this trade soon foundered, “hampered by the many disadvantages involved in transporting it to Europe [and America]” (Kennedy, 6). Despite the quick failure of the American trade in coconut oil, Sāmoa was rapidly becoming more important “in the field of Pacific trade and communication, particularly for the large numbers of American whalers” (Kennedy, 6). Tutuila epitomized this importance, as it is home to the only deep water bay in the Pacific. The United States built a port in the geopolitically powerful bay of Pago

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<sup>30</sup> Imperialist traders were rapaciously interested in sandalwood during the early 1800’s, but Sāmoa has none (Linnekin, 212).

Pago, and quickly began using it as a “coaling station for commercial steamships and United States naval vessels” (Holmes, 20) by 1842.

The Western Sāmoan islands held out a bit longer than their eastern counterparts in their involvement in imperial trade; however, about 25 years after the failed American coconut oil venture in Tutuila, German “planters” from the Hamburg firm, Johann Cesar Godeffroy and Sohn, arrived in Apia – Upolu’s only harbor-like bay. Following the French colonization of Tahiti, Germany swept through the rest of the Pacific before the region had caught the commercial attention of other Western powers, quickly establishing trading outposts in what was soon to become “German New Guinea” – (present-day Papua New Guinea), and Sāmoa by the late 1850s<sup>31</sup>.

By 1857, under the “vigorous agent, August Unshelm, Apia was... built up into the Godeffroy centre for their Polynesian commercial operations” (Kennedy, 6)<sup>32</sup>. The Godeffroy firm’s early economic success can be attributed to isolation, “efficiency,” and perhaps most importantly their “promotion of debased South American currencies as a medium of exchange for the Pacific” (Bollard, 3). During this period, most Western countries had been moving “from a silver-based currency to a gold standard” (Bollard, 8)<sup>33</sup>, due to both the series of North American gold rushes and a dwindling supply of silver from over-exploited South American mines. Therefore, the Godeffroy firm was able to use debased South American currency in their Pacific transactions, and sell their products in Europe for gold. The Godeffroy firm began to

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<sup>31</sup> The first of these German commercial exploration was led by Abel Janszoon Tasman in 1643, after whom the Australian island of Tasmania is named.

<sup>32</sup> At this point, imperial traffic in the South Seas was German-dominated. One sailor remarked: "German trade and German ships are encountered everywhere, almost at the exclusion of any other nation" (Hans-Jürgen, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Britain had transitioned from a silver to gold standard in 1816 and the rest of Europe and America followed between 1871 and 1878 (Bollard, 8).

import cargo loads of South American silver coins to Apia, “mainly in half-dollar pieces” (Bollard, 10). The silver was brought from Valparaiso, where the firm already had a well established trading outpost. This arrangement – “very clever from their own point of view, and very exploitative as far as others were concerned” (Bollard, 3) – ensured the firm’s domination of small Polynesian export economies.

Unshelm’s first impression of Sāmoans was that they were “unusually lazy and slow in anything to do with work and gathering products” (Field, 24), a perceived “trait” that would actually prove a beneficial hindrance to *palagi* exploitation of Sāmoan land and labor. After we recover from the initial shock of Unshelm’s bluntly bigoted view of Sāmoans in relation to Western conceptions of “labor,” the *palagi* condemnation of Sāmoans as “unusually lazy” can in fact be interpreted diametrically differently in its cultural context. The relationship between land, family and work, embodied within the *fa’aSāmoa*, places utmost importance upon service to one’s family. This service, however – often represented by acts of physical labor – was never regimented to the strict confines of a Western “workday”. The *fa’aSāmoa* does not explicitly attribute much, if any, personal recognition to this service – a point I will return to in a later chapter. Thus, the ideal of capitalist labor-relations, in which workers are taken as rational actors always seeking to work towards individual wealth accumulation, falls upon deaf ears when imposed upon the framework of the *fa’aSāmoa*. Additionally, in the absence of a money economy, coupled with near-total Sāmoan land retention at this time, Sāmoans were understandably uninterested in conforming to German labor demands.

The *palagi* critique of a Sāmoan work ethic has, from the beginning, been one of frustration, and ultimately, misunderstanding. The earliest recorded critique of the *fa’aSāmoa* in

relation to capitalist development was by Turner (1884), who bemoaned that “this *communistic* system is a sad hindrance to the industrious, and eats like a canker-worm at the roots of individual and national progress” (Turner, 160). While Turner’s contempt for the *fa’asāmoa* is not even thinly veiled, his perception that “no matter how hard a young man may be disposed to work, he cannot keep his earnings” is an accurate observation. The Western view slanders a Sāmoan approach to income generation, but the *fa’asāmoa* revolves around a set of *communal* values, identities and commitments. There is not even a word for personal ownership or possession in the Sāmoan language. The highest value within the *fa’asāmoa* is placed not on individual achievement, let alone individual accumulation of wealth, but on contributions to and acceptance within the communal whole.

Even though Sāmoa is remote from any continent, it is centrally located within the islands of the huge South Pacific Ocean. As Sāmoa’s only port, Apia quickly became Sāmoa’s commercial hub and imperial-political capital. The Godeffroy enterprise became the main arbiters of trade in the Pacific, and even though Sāmoa itself possessed no niche resources, Apia “served as an entrepôt for trade in oil, tortoise-shell, pearl... copra” and sandalwood, “brought there from smaller agencies established in Fiji, Tonga, Tahiti, the Gilberts and the Marquesas” (Kennedy, 6)<sup>34</sup>. The Godeffroy firm at this time was not yet employing or indenturing Sāmoan laborers, instead focusing on establishing Apia as a central Pacific hub through which to funnel their wide array of merchandise.

The Godeffroy firm posted such handsome profits in trade, that a Hamburg consulate was established in Apia by 1862, with the firm’s manager acting as the head German consul

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<sup>34</sup> By this time, the Godeffroy firm already possessed “extensive trading experience in areas as far apart as Hawaii, Valparaiso, Victoria and California” (Kennedy, 6).

(Keesing, 67). By 1864, the firm was exporting products back to Europe on small “schooners of 40 to 140 tons... [and] larger brigantines”, and before long “10 ships loading each year for Europe” (Bollard, 4). This same year, August Unshelm was replaced by Theodor Weber, “a dynamic and ruthless organizer” (Kennedy, 6), who proved to be perhaps the most influential German political figure in the islands over the next few decades. Weber revamped the firm by increasing the efficiency of export<sup>35</sup>.

Before Weber, the firm shipped both Sāmoan-made coconut oil and un-dried coconut meat to be dried and pressed into oil in Europe. The coconut oil the firm could attain from Sāmoans was deemed too crude: “the manufacture of the oil is carried out in the rudest manner, the nut is scraped and placed, mixed with a little sea water, in hollow logs, to putrefy. The oil disengages itself, and is collected at the bottom of the trough” (Bollard, 5). This Sāmoan-produced oil was extremely labor intensive, and the firm believed that by only accepting the raw copra that it would be “possible to encourage growers to produce larger amounts of copra” (Bollard, 5). The raw copra was easier to transport, but since the un-dried meat would often rot in transit to Europe, Weber demanded that Sāmoans first dry their coconut before selling it to the firm, although the Sāmoans did not receive a better price. Now, the copra could be safely shipped to Europe, used as fuel for the German schooners combustion engines during transit, “crushed in huge hydraulic presses [in Hamburg] to obtain a high grade oil” (Bollard, 6), and finally, the coconut “residue [would be] turned into cattle-feed” (Kennedy, 6).

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<sup>35</sup> At this time, the firm began being known as the “old firm” among Sāmoans.

## The Fiction of Land

In 1865, the Godeffroy firm became the first European power to succeed in appropriating portions of Sāmoan agricultural land. Prior to Weber's land acquisition – which had taken place “under dubious circumstances” (Kennedy, 7), to say the least – the firm relied upon Sāmoans to provide the raw (and later the completely dried) copra (coconut meat) that was then pressed into oil. However, because production was completely in Sāmoan hands, the firm had little to no sway in dictating the amount or regularity of copra they could trade for.

From this time “onwards, the Germans dominated Sāmoan trade” (Kennedy, 6), and “German rule, as everyone in Sāmoa was aware, meant Godffroy rule” (Kennedy, 7). This first Godffroy plantation can be seen as the “crucial factor which led to the formation of a German interest in the internal politics of Sāmoa” (Kennedy, 7). In the hope of acquiring both more land and safety of tenure, German “interest” hinged on an aspiration to manipulate, foment and ultimately to streamline inter-titular Sāmoan rivalries into a central, German-controlled government.

In 1868, Sāmoa experienced one of its bloodiest “post-contact” civil wars, spurred initially by contestations over the Malietoa *matai* title, held at the time by Malietoa Laupepa. In a race to arms, the different warring factions of Sāmoans “readily granted their (and anybody else's) lands for ridiculous prices in order to obtain arms and ammunition” (Kennedy, 11). Out of this conflict, Sāmoan supporters of the opposing Malietoa – Malietoa Talavou – established a political headquarters at Mulinu'u, “a flat and narrow peninsula along the western edge of Apia harbor” (Field, 22).



**Figure 21. Malietoa Laupepa circa 1880 (Smith, NLNZ).**

Coincidentally, the American Civil War was in full swing, and Germans, who could not meet their need for cotton from the American South, were consequently interested in using their newly attained Sāmoan land to grow cotton. Soon, the firm's coconut plantations were “planted in cotton, and later inter-planted with coconuts, an investment which required a considerably longer time perspective than most traders were prepared to allow” (Bollard, 6). By 1872, the firm had three plantations established, with approximately 400 acres under cultivation by at least “400 indentured laborers brought from Niue, the New Hebrides and Gilbert Islands” (Bollard,

7)<sup>36</sup>, whom the Germans referred to as “black boys”, as well as over a thousand Chinese indentured laborers (Tom, 1) – yet another interesting chapter in Sāmoan history, one that I do not devote time to in this thesis.

Seeing what the Germans were up to, the other imperial powers jumped into the fray, afraid they might somehow be missing out, and Sāmoans “sold” their land to anyone who gave them munitions in exchange. It is unclear which Sāmoans “sold” the initial land to Weber, and for what price; however, land “sales” by Sāmoans to Germans increased quickly thereafter, at an alarming and, ultimately, fictional rate. By the time the fighting had slowed in May of 1873, both Germans and “Sāmoans were shocked to learn that they had sold off more land than actually existed in Sāmoa” (Field, 30)<sup>37</sup>. For example, Weber supposedly bought land he “estimated to total 25,000 acres” while a syndicate from San Francisco – the Central Polynesian Land and Commercial Company – “claimed that it had bought over 300,000 acres” (Kennedy, 11). There are only 277,760 acres on the main island of Upolu<sup>38</sup>.

### **Who Has the *Pule*?**

Apprehending the inner-workings and “pre” history of the *matai* system is a prerequisite to comprehending the dizzying complexity of political power contestations that intensified

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<sup>36</sup> In 1884, Weber introduced the first cocoa production in Sāmoa, and shortly afterwards coffee joined the firm’s export portfolio” (Bollard, 7). The firm also had plans to import Chinese “coolies” and “Chilean mules and mule drivers via the [firms’] Valparaiso connection” (Bollard, 7), but were hindered by the fictional land debacle.

<sup>37</sup> A problem later dealt with in 1903 by a Land Commission, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

<sup>38</sup> In total, the four Sāmoan islands comprise some 699,520 acres, but most of the land “sold” was said to have been in Upolu.

through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Sāmoa. I have previously discussed distinctions between *ali'i* and *tulafale*. The titles are “bestowed by territorially based extended families rather than inherited by a fixed rule, and accession to a title indicates the support and loyalty of local political leaders” (Linnekin, 541).

After the land debacle came to light, Germany attempted to ramp up political domination so as to protect their commercial interests and property associated with the coconut trade, some of which had been collateral damage during the newly subsided civil war. Germany and the other Western powers were somewhat savvy to the existence and importance of aligning themselves with opposing, paramount *matai*. However, in the numerous attempts by colonial forces to construct a Sāmoan “king”, there was a consistent failure to install a Sāmoan who held all four paramount titles.

Obtainment of all four paramount titles was “absolutely necessary by Sāmoan custom not only to fulfill ceremonial requirements, but also to have any security of tenure” (Keesing, 63). Although several *matai* were hailed as the “king” throughout the colonial period – either by one or all of the Western powers – by not managing to coerce the four paramount districts into bestowing a *Tafa'ifā* title, the West ultimately failed at constructing a “king” who would also pass by Sāmoan standards. Finally, even if a Western power *had* secured a “puppet” candidate as *Tafa'ifā*, their biggest downfall was the failure to understand that:

traditional political decision-makers were not the sacred chiefs of Sāmoa – not even he [sic] who held the office of [*Tafa'ifā*]. Decisions of national importance were made, district by district, by councils constituted of the highest chiefs and their orators, who debated matters until there was a consensus of all leading polities. Without this consensus there could be no decision (Meleisa, xii).

The *Tafa'ifā* was an almost mythical position, only achieved a handful of times over centuries. The requirements for more centralized rule in Sāmoa were thus prohibitive, virtually *ensuring* decentralization.

### **The American Imposter**

The arrival of the American Colonel Albert B. Steinberger in June, 1873, marked a new chapter in imperial Sāmoan politics. Steinberger had been appointed to Sāmoa by President Grant as a “special emissary in foreign relations,” and was “subject neither to Senate confirmation nor to authorization by law” (Stathis, 86). In effect, Steinberger was a secret agent sent personally by Grant to Sāmoa with the task of securing American interests in the island chain. Stathis (1982) argues that few other American emissary “appointments have proven more provocative and intriguing than... Steinberger’s” (Stathis, 86).

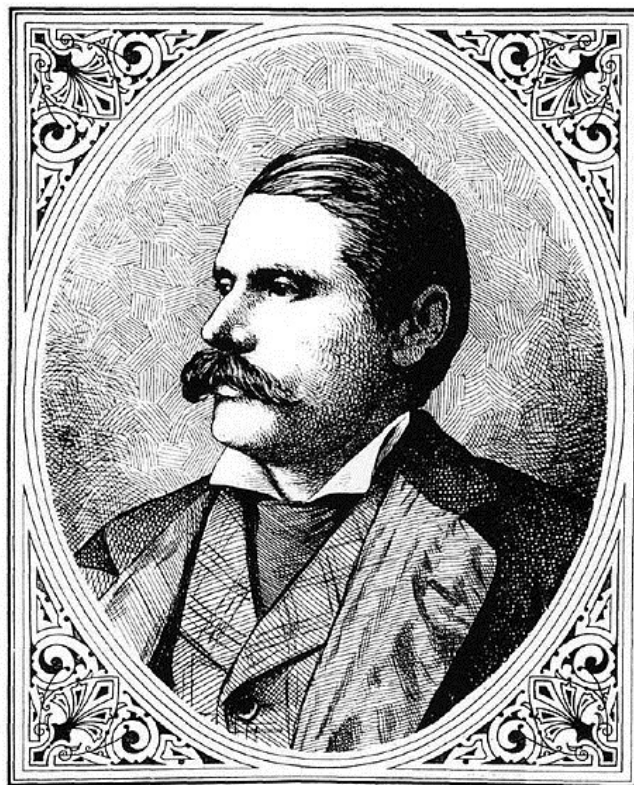
Prior to embarking for Sāmoa, Steinberger was sent to France, where he had a “personal 2013 with Napoléon III,” during which he successfully negotiated a large contract for an American munitions syndicate to “provide the French with arms... during the Franco-Prussian War” (Stathis, 88). Napoléon expressed no interest in Sāmoa.

Steinberger embarked on his mysterious mission to Sāmoa from San Francisco on June 29, 1873. However, news of his trip preceded him, and there was much press speculation about

the premises of his trip. The *New York Daily Tribune* pontificated that his departure signified an American effort to secure land for tropical fruit export, claiming that the:

Charms of the tropical scenery, perennial fruits, and a confiding, half clad, dusky population, have long exercised a singular fascination over the official mind, and what may be called the *banana principle* in politics has become a recognized influence in our political affair (Stathis, 90).

En route to Sāmoa, Steinberger met with the Hawaiian King Lunalilo in Waikiki “to assure him that he was ‘in no [way] accredited to his government, and that the news-venders in this, as in many other cases, were irresponsible agitators’” (Stathis, 89). Upon finally arriving in Sāmoa in early August, Steinberger began “one of the most intriguing episodes in America’s territorial expansion” (Stathis, 89).



**Figure 22. Illustration of Albert B. Steinberger (Daily Graphic, 254).**

Although Steinberger was indeed sent as an emissary, his motives seemed to quickly diverge from his job description, and he straight-away embarked on a quest to become Sāmoa's first white premier. Unbeknownst to his own government, Steinberger set to work organizing what he hoped would result in a "unified body politic" (Kennedy, 12), leading many of the white settlers in Sāmoa to believe that "he was preparing the ground for an eventual American takeover" (Field, 23). Steinberger took a liking to Sāmoa and to Sāmoans, claiming that Sāmoans felt that, for the first time, "they had met a white man other than the missionaries who advised them against the sale of their land and mingled freely with them without sinister motives" (Stathis, 90).

By 1873, Malietoa Laupepa – who held the Gato'aitele and Tamasoali'i titles (Meleisa, xii) – was the most powerful *matai* on Upolu, and aligned himself with the newly arrived Steinberger. Laupepa hoped that Steinberger would prove an important ally: that American interests would be solely commercial-based, and that the U.S. would not interfere with Sāmoan politics to the degree Germany was attempting.

Laupepa's hope was shared by many of the powerful *matai* in the Apia area. Given his widespread endorsement among the Sāmoans, Steinberger successfully helped construct the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule* councils: twin councils of *matai*, based on the original structure of the *Tumua* and *Pule*, bestowed with the task of streamlining Sāmoan political interests, especially in the Apia area. Steinberger appointed Malietoa Laupepa as the head delegate of both councils. Shortly after the formation of the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule*, the council drafted the first Sāmoan Constitution and Code of Laws on August 21, 1873 (Stathis, 90). The *Ta'imua* and *Faipule* were to act as two houses of parliament, authorized to "levy and collect taxes, to pay

debts, to provide for the common defense and general welfare, to borrow and coin money, to regulate foreign commerce, and to build post offices and roads” (Stathis, 95).

The Germans in Sāmoa were understandably wary of this newly arrived American’s zeal, and worried that Steinberger’s real motivation was to undermine their export market in favor of American interests. To quell this suspicion, Steinberger made a trip to Hamburg, during which he obtained the Godeffroy firm’s endorsement for his premiership “in return for guaranteeing the company’s lands and assuring them of a virtual monopoly of the native-produced copra” (Kennedy, 9). Under this agreement, Steinberger arranged to receive a “10% commission for all materials which the Sāmoan government purchased from the [Godeffroy] firm, and a 10% commission for all products sold to it by the Sāmoans” (Stathis, 93).

However, the United States government denounced Steinberger after learning of his secret deal with the “old firm”. Upon returning to Sāmoa from Hamburg in 1875, Steinberger was declared a fraud and peremptorily deported by his own government. Additionally, British and American consulates coerced Malietoa Laupepa into condoning Steinberger’s deportation. Laupepa’s action “so upset his chiefly cabinet that they deposed him, thus dividing and weakening the districts that supported the government, and leading to the outbreak of another war between the two factions that same year” (Meleisa, xii).

An additional, violent encounter added to Steinberger’s chaotic legacy. In 1876, the British Captain Charles Stevens, commanding the HMS *Barracouta*, arrived in Apia to investigate why Steinberger – his personal friend – had been deported. Stevens went ashore with

fifty British men to attend an LMS church service. Whilst inside the church, the British found themselves surrounded by at least 100 armed Sāmoans of the Malietoa faction. The Sāmoans saw the British presence as yet another unwanted Western presence vying for power in the Steinberger aftermath. Both the British and Sāmoan men opened fire, armed with “breech-loading repeating rifles” (NSW, 11). The shootout resulted in the wounding of 11 British sailors, three of whom later died from their wounds. The Sāmoans suffered a greater loss, with 11 left dead, and an additional 35 men wounded (NSW, 12). This brutal encounter, however, did not rouse immediate vengeance, but instead deflected Britain’s interest in the islands for the next few years.

Although Steinberger was physically out of the picture, the residue of his idea of establishing a “titular supremacy” lingered on within the imperial discourse surrounding Sāmoa. This “supremacy,” similar to an American presidency, would have a “figurehead [Sāmoan] king... [who] would hold office for four years” (Field, 23). After Steinberger’s deportation, inter-titular Sāmoan rivalries seemed to erupt. I believe it is important to clarify that Sāmoans had not suddenly adopted or assimilated the Western ideal of a centralized and hierarchical political supremacy. Rather, given the backing of rival Sāmoan factions by competing Western powers, many inter-titular rivalries were freshly invigorated, if not constructed altogether.

Here, once again, we see the inherent omission of some of history’s multiple and potential trajectories when looking at the past through the lens of the present. Even now, we have many theoretical lenses to choose from: unconscious *palagi* preconceptions are being challenged, for *palagis*, by more conscious post-Marxist dialectical understandings that fully

appreciate divergent and inherently different worldviews. From the standpoint of a dialectical understanding of Sāmoan politics, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the extent to which inter-titular “contestations” were fomented or reinterpreted both through a Western or Sāmoan lens. For one, there is a lack of written Sāmoan accounts of this period, and even if there were, Sāmoan historians of this time may have been reticent to share their “truth” with a *palagi* audience.

As a recipient of Steinberger’s support, Malietoa Laupepa had been viewed with increasing unease by the German<sup>39</sup>. With Steinberger’s deportation, Laupepa was “summarily dethroned [sic]” (Keesing, 65) by the German government, after which the *Ta’imua* and *Faipule* did *not* “appoint a successor to the deposed Laupepa” (Kennedy, 12). Void of any Western backing, Laupepa subsequently organized a rival organization called the *Puletua*.

Kennedy (1974) argues that the *Ta’imua* and *Faipule* decision not to appoint a successor to head the councils – although it was certainly within their power – was “possibly because of their own [the council’s] disunity” (Kennedy, 12). While this assumption is not ungrounded, given the dizzying complexity of Sāmoan politics at this time, I would argue that it might very well have been a conscious decision by the elected *matai* of both councils. By not appointing a successor, the council was sure to disintegrate Steinberger’s attempted and ultimately fictitious construct of a centralized Sāmoan body politic. And while this might be interpreted as a lack of

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<sup>39</sup> As the Malietoa title had consistently presented the most political clout during this century, those loyal to Malietoa were known as members of the “old party”.

decision, per the *fa'aSāmoa*, I believe that the *fono* made a calculated and wise decision by frustrating and ultimately preventing an aggregation of political power.

Thus the imperial scramble for control over Sāmoan politics raged on, as “white interests maneuvered between the Sāmoan groupings in order to secure political and commercial advantage” (Kennedy, 12). This “scramble” was another dialectic, one in which different Western powers did not simply jockey for position while Sāmoa lay inert and immobile, but where different, pre-existing and newly-constructed Sāmoan political rivalries were intensified, as each faction endeavored “to strengthen their hands by obtaining the support of one of the great powers” (Kennedy, 12). Also, different Sāmoan factions did not have much interest in *which* Western power backed them, as long as the backing was not for too much land as collateral. Again, Sāmoans were doing one set of things amongst *each other*, another set of things in relation to *palagis*, and, meanwhile, the *palagis* were doing a whole other set of political jockeying amongst each other, and yet again another set of things with the Sāmoans.

Keesing (1934) believes that the *fa'aSāmoa* survived this politically tumultuous period relatively intact, arguing that “had a single power taken charge... as was the case in most other Polynesian areas, the old ways and indigenous leadership would have broken down, with... dire consequences that came about elsewhere in the islands during the 19th century” (Keesing, 75). Tennent (1926) correctly echoes this theory, claiming that had there been a unified body politic, Sāmoans would “have had gold in their teeth, but little to no land; trousers and shirts, but nothing to speak of in the way of chests” (Tennent, 21). Hence the years of “undignified

squabbling by the [Western] powers” (Tennent, 21), paired with intense inter-Sāmoan power contestations, the islands were spared the potential devastation of a monolithic, top-down imperial regime.

While *palagi* authors like Keesing and Tennent are not wrong in their assessment of the potential consequences of political centralization, they are missing one component in the fullness of the dynamic: what was happening *within* the Sāmoan factions. Within the *matai* system, organic, natural authority is recognized from the bottom up, with important decisions requiring consensus at a village and district level. Within the *fa'amatai*, there exists no “state”, or required allegiance to a state. Indeed, the Western concept of a “state” is nonexistent in Sāmoan consciousness, hence there was nothing *missing*, and hence no void which the *palagis* could fill. And the “failure” to establish a centralized government was not an accidental benefit that preserved the *fa'aSāmoa* as Keesing argues, but the *result of* the Sāmoans adhering to their powerful and rich worldview that made centralization distasteful and well-nigh unattainable.

### **The Dialectics of Manipulation**

In 1877, the newly deposed Malietoa Laupepa moved the *Puletua* seat of government to the A'ana district. Members of the rival government, the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule*, grew nervous of a Laupepa-influenced total German takeover, and “hastily dispatched a delegation to Fiji to request [the British consulate] Sir Arthur Gordon to grant a protectorate” (Kennedy, 13). Gordon demanded, in exchange, a total “cession of sovereignty” (Kennedy, 13), insisting that Sāmoa

should become a crown colony similar to Fiji. Surprisingly, Gordon did not cite the *Barracouta* incident as a disincentive for Britain to acquire Sāmoa as a colony. The Sāmoan delegation refused Gordon's conditions, only to return to Sāmoa in July to find a German warship docked in Apia harbor. Unable to "gain British protection", and fearing a German siege of Apia, the delegates strategically proclaimed "we are bound not to give superiority to any of the great Governments over Germany" (Kennedy, 13).

The German warship had been called to Apia by none other than Theodor Weber. The Godeffroy firm had been reorganized into the *Deutsche Handels-und Plantagen-Gessellschaft* (DHPG); a "part-German-government-owned, Pacific-wide firm" (Field, 29), with Weber still in head command. The combination of the German warship's ominous presence, coupled with the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule* delegation's refusal to become a crown colony, left Germany the dominant Western power in Sāmoa.

The next year, in 1878, the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule* sent another Sāmoan delegation to the United States, who met with the same all-or-nothing demands which they promptly rejected<sup>40</sup>. It is important to distinguish the nature of the delegate trips to Fiji and the United States as *not* an infantile or helpless Sāmoan plea, but rather as an attempt to lessen the influence of "pestering firms and threatening consuls" (Kennedy, 13). Despite these few attempts to shrug the imperial presence in Sāmoa from one superpower to another, the "conflicts had the effect of maintaining the social system and morale, of strengthening the native leadership, and leaving the group other than around Apia little touched by white influences" (Keesing, 75).

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<sup>40</sup> From 1872 onwards, many Americans had been urging Congress to secure control of Pago Pago harbor, thus securing America at the geopolitical heart of the South Pacific (Keesing, 66).

In late March of 1878, the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule* met again with Sir Arthur Gordon, this time in Sāmoa. Gordon had recently been promoted to British High Commissioner, “which gave him jurisdiction over British subjects in uncolonized groups throughout the western Pacific” (Kennedy, 14), thus he traveled to Sāmoa to investigate the sudden death of the British consul Liardet. Also, although he had not sought reparations during his first meeting with the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule* during their Fijian meeting, Gordon attempted to impose a tax upon the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule* for the *Barracouta* incident.

A meeting was called by Gordon of the rival Sāmoan governments and the three Western consulates – Germany, Britain and America – during which Gordon pronounced: “not only is domestic anarchy inevitable but [another] violent collision with the white residents highly probable” (Kennedy, 14). Over mounting fear of simmering Sāmoan unrest, a convention was signed declaring Apia as “neutral territory”, “to be governed by a Municipal Board consisting of the consuls, and in which whites were to enjoy extra-territorial privileges” (Keesing, 67). Thus, an unprecedented political geography was formed: an “international autonomous area... within this independent Sāmoa” (Keesing, 67).

A year later, to further pacify diplomatic relations, a Sāmoan-German treaty of friendship was signed on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1879. This treaty allowed Germany “freedom from import and export duties and the right to build a naval station in the port of Saluafata” (Kennedy, 17), located on the Western tip of Upolu. Under “official aid for the promotion of German commerce abroad by the German Commercial and Plantation Association of the Southern Seas” (Hobson,

129), the DHPG “owned” four plantations in Upolu and one on Savai’i; totaling an estimated 4,933 acres, a considerable reduction from the initial, false claim of 25,000 acres, but still the “largest single complex of tropical agriculture in German colonies” (Tom, 1). Given the DHPG’s virtual monopoly over the coconut oil trade and the newly signed treaty of friendship, Germany poured money into infrastructure to aid oil export.

Germany’s treaty prompted Gordon to seek a similar agreement with the Sāmoan government, and an Anglo-Sāmoan treaty was signed on August 28, 1879 (Kennedy, 20). Under the treaty, Britain received “confirmation of lands acquired by British traders in a ‘legal’ manner” (Kennedy, 20), and the “right” to erect a coaling station in any of Sāmoa’s harbors other than Apia, Saluafata or Pago Pago. This was a safe offer on the Sāmoans’ part – there *were* no other suitable bays left in Sāmoa; Britain would not be able to construct its own harbor, thus dampening their imperial interest in the islands.

Despite both German-Sāmoan and Anglo-Sāmoan treaties of friendship, Sāmoan political autonomy had declined considerably. In regards to Sāmoan customary land, in each treaty the Western powers promised “to preserve the territorial integrity of the islands” (Kennedy, 20). The treaties can be seen as a strategic move by the different factions of the Sāmoan government to suppress imperial squabbling and stave off any heavier bloodshed, but in effect, the treaties also granted more freedom to both German and British trading interests, because Apia “was now outside the jurisdiction of the Sāmoans” (Kennedy, 21).

However, this new period, despite giving the outward appearance of relative calm, was perversely seen as unbeneficial by the competing Western firms. This sentiment is perhaps best summarized by the astonishingly cynical and blunt remarks of the British consul, Mr. Hill, who stated:

it is always worthwhile to encourage a native dispute when it creates a demand for muskets and lowers the price of land... the taste for gin will increase, and when the natives have become hopelessly demoralized and have lost all claim to their lands, and a mixed government have succeeded in involving the country in debt, there will be an outcry from the *owners of the soil* against native depredations, and a demand for Chinamen and Indian coolies, and the large estates and interests of Germans and Englishmen will be urged as a strong reason for foreign interference and annexation (Kennedy, 24).

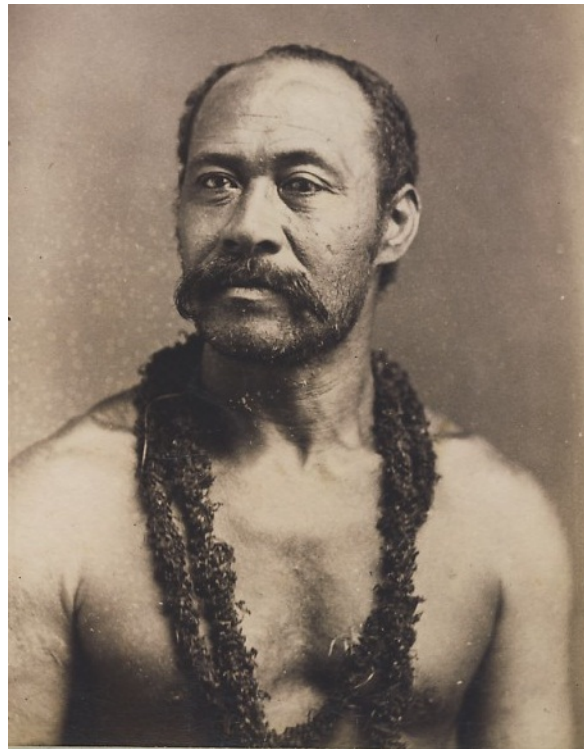
When yet another outburst of civil war erupted in October of 1879, it neither surprised nor disappointed the Western powers. The selling of Sāmoan customary land to Western firms in exchange for munitions and alcohol had become common practice during periods of violence. And, as Hill so chillingly noted, the price of this land was indeed greatly reduced during times of inter-Sāmoan conflict.

This bout of violence was quashed with the arrival of the German *Bismarck* warship to Apia in December. Once again, it was Weber, by this time backing Tavalou Tamasese Titimea's (Tavalou) party, who summoned the warship. Shortly after the *Bismarck's* arrival, the Tavalou Tamasese and Laupepa parties signed the Lackawanna Treaty<sup>41</sup> on December 15<sup>th</sup> acknowledging "Tavalou as king and Laupepa as regent" (Kennedy, 25). Under the new treaty, more elected positions within the *Ta'imua* and *Faipule* were created to contain chiefs from both parties.

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<sup>41</sup> Named after the German warship it was signed on.

Unfortunately, the December 15<sup>th</sup> treaty's peace ended along with Tavalou, who passed away on November 7, 1880, “plunging the islands once more into a state of confusion and rivalry” (Kennedy, 25). By July of 1881, there was yet another reorganization of the highest offices, this time with Malietoa Laupepa as “king,” Tupua Tamasese Titimea (Tamasese) – Tavalou Tamasese’s 19-year old son – as “vice-king”, and Mata’afa Iosefo – a key political actor from this time onwards – as “premier” (Keesing, 68). Laupepa’s “old party”, most of whom were “members or adherents of the Tupua family” had been increasingly aligning themselves with American and British interests, and re-established themselves at Mulinu’u.



**Figure 23. Earliest available photo of Tupua Tamasese Titimea, circa 1900 (Smith, NLNZ).**

Despite the seemingly constant civil unrest, Sāmoa was the most valuable German overseas “asset” by this point, increasingly the envy of the other superpowers vying for control in the Pacific. I believe that Linnekin (1994) rightly refutes Kennedy’s (1974) characterization

of the territorial contest for Sāmoa as a “tangle”. Instead, Germany, Britain and America had reached a “stalemate in part because none wanted to rule Sāmoa as a colony, but each feared the consequences of allowing the islands to fall to one of the other powers” (Linnekin, 542). By this point, the “decades of partisan arms sales, saber rattling, moral exhortation, political advice, and international conferencing [had] failed” (Linnekin, 542) in producing either a Western *or* Sāmoan centrally governed body politic – not that this had *ever* been a Sāmoan objective. During this time, the myriad of Sāmoan factions consistently sent the vying *palagi* forces mixed messages, and often times appeared unresponsive to *palagi* interests. This is the silent counterpart often omitted from a Western telling of this period of history.

Fragmentation continued, with Malietoa Laupepa now being openly supported by both Britain and America, while Tupua Tamasese Titimea maintained strong German backing. Beginning in 1883, Eugen Brandeis, a DHPG employee, replaced Weber as Germany’s most important political actor in Sāmoa, forging a close personal alliance with Tamasese. In January of 1885, Brandeis “masterminded” a coup to overturn the Lackawanna Treaty, claiming that the DHPG owned the land at Mulinu’u where the seat of government was held. Tamasese was encouraged to “pull out of the Mulinu’u government and hoist his own flag in A’ana’s capital, Leulumoega” (Field, 24), which had traditionally been a “Sāmoan political power center” (Linnekin, 543), and “renewed his efforts to found a national government there and to become king” (Meleisa, xiii).

The following few years saw tremendous worldwide German colonial expansion, as the German Empire spread its talons to clutch a wide swath of geography spanning the “Cameroons,

Togoland, South-West Africa, East Africa, New Guinea, and the Bismarck Archipelago”  
(Kennedy, 25).

In 1885, Malietoa made a personal appeal to Queen Victoria, justifying his own right to rule. Linnekin (1994) argues that Malietoa’s written plea “indicates the nascent historical development of a nationalist discourse” (Linnekin, 554). Malietoa began the letter: “*O le tu e masani ai lo matou atunu’u e amata mai anamua e o’o mai lava i ona po nei,*” (the customs of our country from the earliest times to the present day)” (Linnekin, 554), signifying the first written Sāmoan record crystallizing the *fa’aSāmoa*.

## Chapter V.

### *Imperial Stalemate*

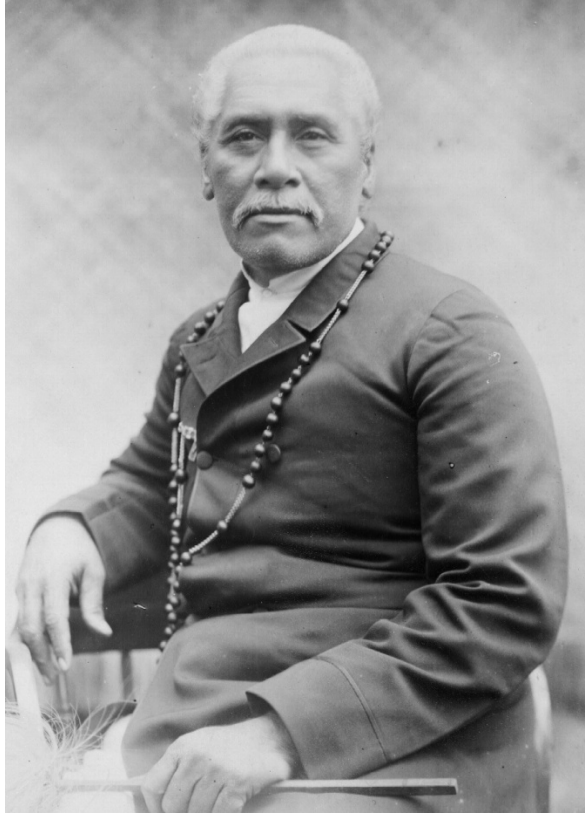
#### **The Tamasese-Brandeis Regime**

During a precolonial period of Anglo-German mercantile rivalry, a German premier ruled the Sāmoan government through a puppet king, and warships cruising off-shore enforced German tax demands. (Linnekin, 539).

In 1886, the Tamasese-Brandeis regime once again moved their seat of government to occupy the recently evacuated grounds at Mulinu'u, while Malietoa, "still recognized as the legal ruler by Britain and the United States" (Linnekin, 543), licked his wounds in the neighboring Tuamasaga district. Germany recognized Tamasese's Mulinu'u as the "only government", and Brandeis assumed the position of "premier" under "king" Tamasese. From Tuamasaga, Malietoa continued his staunch opposition to German economic domination, and "finally, on the grounds that he had insulted the Emperor, the German authorities declared war against him" (Keesing, 69). In a public proclamation, Malietoa yielded, in order to avoid any bloodshed, and in 1887

the Germans deported him first to the Marshall Islands, and then to the newly acquired German colony Cameroons, in Africa (Keesing, 69, Field, 24).

Established at Mulinu'u in 1887, the Tamasese-Brandeis regime brought about the most coercive government Sāmoa had experienced thus far. For the first time in “post-contact” Sāmoa, the regime possessed a “virtual monopoly of force in the archipelago... prepared to compel Sāmoan obedience to the laws of a national government” (Linnekin, 547). During the end of nineteenth-century, “Western colonial governments... were obsessed with centralization”, which they were convinced would result in the “creation of a lasting, unified national government in Sāmoa” (Linnekin, 549). However, endless Western attempts at centralization consistently failed to recognize that the Sāmoan power structure was designed to inhibit centralization. The *palagi* obsession with centralization stemmed from the Western conception that centralization would increase efficiency, confer legitimacy and result in successful domination. This obsession showcases a *palagi* failure to understand that, for Sāmoans, centralization did not necessarily imply legitimacy, nor did it guarantee allegiance.



**Figure 24. Mata'afa Iosefo, circa 1890 (Smith, NLNZ).**

The Western construction of a Sāmoan “kingship” has something of a “parallel in indigenous forms of authority” (Linnekin, 549) – the previously discussed paramount titles – however, the Europeans viewed this kingship as a mere figurehead. Although Tamasese is often described as a “puppet” king, “his alliance with the Germans was a calculated political play” given that, “like his rivals, Tamasese enjoyed only partial support among Sāmoans,” and he soon became “embroiled in a title dispute with another important figure in his own faction, Mata'afa [Iosefo]” (Linnekin, 544). In other words, Tamasese was attempting to use the Germans as much as the Germans were trying to use him.

In an initial statement of intent, Brandeis had no qualms about announcing the regime's intended policies:

Before the establishment of this Government the natives could evade their engagements without incurring punishment, but the actual Government has the will and the power to enforce the fulfillment of engagements taken by the natives and will do it unflinchingly (Linnekin, 547).

In an attempt to bolster German power whilst undercutting British and American interests and profits, Brandeis armed a Sāmoan militia with munitions purchased on credit from the DHPG store (Linnekin, 544), and prohibited English traders from selling guns and ammunition to Sāmoans.

The LMS remained the largest English presence on the islands, and although they were not a competing Western firm, the German "administration appears to have given serious thought to the possibility of controlling mission effort" (Keesing, 404). The German policy approach, however, was to permit what they saw as the "careless sowing of the seed of Christian doctrine in unexplored ground" which "inevitably brings dissension" (Keesing, 404). In this hands-off approach, the Germans assumed that the LMS's work would lead to dissension amongst the Sāmoan population, producing a suitable conjuncture during which to establish centralized rule. This plan, however, had the opposite effect. The aforementioned "Sāmoanization" of Christianity resulted in Sāmoans being able to level the judgment against mercantilist, imperial firms as being "un-Christian" in their enforcement of taxes and debt repayments. It just so happened that the most consequential measures enacted by Tamasese-Brandeis was the new government's stance on taxes, debts, land mortgages and enforced repayment.

The retention of most Sāmoan customary land meant that massive dispossession had not occurred, and that the majority of Sāmoans could continue subsisting, without being forced into indentured, plantation labor. And although the DHPG “owned” sizable acreage, their imported, indentured labor force was not yet large enough “to produce a significant share of the output” (Linnekin, 543) and, at the time, “copra delivered was arguably more valuable to the firm than land” (Linnekin, 546). In effect, this left the DHPG reliant upon independent Sāmoan copra production for roughly 75 percent of their exports.

Understandably, Sāmoans were not inclined to meet the firm’s strict quotas or deadlines, and the DHPG had grown increasingly frustrated by their lack of control over the fluctuating trade, in which Sāmoans had the upper hand. Loans and subsequent debts were not a new concept in Sāmoa, as many cash advances had been given out by competing Western mercantilists during the civil unrest of the 1870s.

To receive cash advances or tax exemption vouchers, Sāmoans were required to sign a *feagaiga* (contract), “whereby a communal body, usually a village, mortgaged its land until the debt was repaid” (Linnekin, 543). If these debts were not repaid in copra, the firm had the “right” to seize the mortgaged land. However, given the debacle over confused, overlapping and fictional claims to land during the recent civil war, coupled with the fact that debts and communal mortgages were “proliferating to a point where they might prove unrecoverable” (Linnekin, 547)<sup>42</sup>, it became increasingly “unlikely that traders wanted to follow through on land

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<sup>42</sup> The most egregious example of this was the mortgaging of the entire A'ana district to the DHPG, which comprises roughly one-third of the island of Upolu. The district’s debts were never paid, and the firm eventually dropped the debt in frustration.

mortgages to any great extent” (Linnekin, 546). Additionally, with *feagaiga* concerning copra, the Western firms still had little clout in determining the “volume and scheduling of the supply”, and quality control was “wholly in Sāmoan hands... during the preparation process” (Linnekin, 543).

Western consumer goods were the main incentive for Sāmoans to procure and trade copra. However, the trading firms charged grossly inflated prices. In response, Sāmoans construed a myriad of strategies to “to get the better of transactions with traders” (Linnekin, 548). The trading of unripe or inadequately dried nuts, often weighed down further with rocks, coral or saltwater, was commonplace, while at the same time, traders “routinely doctored their scales in the other direction” (Linnekin, 548).

Debts, to be paid in the form of copra, were contracted by Sāmoans who could not immediate exchange the dried coconuts for consumer goods. Debts were “an attempt to snare the Sāmoans into supplying copra; but for the Sāmoans, credit was a way to get money and Western goods in exchange for a promise” (Linnekin, 551). Here it is crucial to not view these contracted debts under the “premise of Sāmoan powerlessness in transactions with foreigners” (Linnekin, 552), but rather, to conceive of debt as producing a dialectic between Sāmoan copra producers and Western firms, in which debt became a tool of Sāmoan leverage.

### **The Poll Tax**

In October of 1887, in an attempt to further tip the imperial scales towards German control, the Brandeis-Tamasese regime enacted a poll tax against “every able-bodied adult, male and female, to be paid in about four weeks” (Linnekin, 544). Because debts up until this point had historically been paid in copra, debt collection – or in this case imposition – was the main coercive tactic to extract more and frequent amounts of copra from Sāmoan production. A dollar was then roughly equivalent to fifty to sixty pounds of copra.

Linnekin (1994) posits the example of Sāmoan debt repayment as a simultaneous “unsystematic, local resistance” (Linnekin, 539), and also as a tool with which Sāmoans were able to “exercise a reciprocal leverage” (Linnekin, 539) against attempted Western domination. From the advent of colonial capitalism, indebtedness has been the most commonly employed tactic to snare peripheral locations and establish Western “exploitative leverage or ‘clout’” (Linnekin, 542). The entire latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Sāmoa, especially the period of time after the Brandeis-Tamasese regime’s tax imposition, provides a “compelling case for the efficacy of... indigenous resistance” (Linnekin, 540). While this resistance has since been largely historicized as “unsystematic” or “unorganized”, I believe that this “everyday resistance” can be seen as motivated by revolutionary intentions.

The years prior to the Tamasese-Brandeis regime would point towards the failure of the Sāmoans to present a united front; however, these seemingly unending political disputes were largely exacerbated by Western influence. Thus, while resistance to debt repayment might be viewed as not occurring under the guise of a “united front”, it nevertheless had the effect of stunting Western economic intrusion further into the islands.

In addition to the 1887 poll tax, Brandeis went a step further, and wrote a decree prohibiting repayment of pre-existing Sāmoan debts to any non-German firm until the poll tax was first paid off. In perhaps the most extreme example of this decree in effect, in May of 1888, a Sāmoan LMS mission teacher named Le'auga, from the village of Vailu'utai in Upolu, borrowed four dollars from the McArthur firm to repay the Brandeis-Tamasese poll tax for his family. Upon his walk to the neighboring village of Fasito'otai with two baskets of copra to repay the McArthur firm, he was stopped by the German magistrate and forbidden from paying the English firm. For this apparent act of defiance, Le'auga was “arrested and sentenced to three weeks' imprisonment in the capital” (Linnekin, 545).

To the small European population in Sāmoa at this time, “jailing a man for paying a debt seemed egregious, incomprehensible, and tyrannical” (Linnekin, 545), even though “the incident does make sense... within its specific historical context” (Linnekin, 539). Le'auga's imprisonment sparked outcry from both the British Consul in Apia and the Consul General for the Western Pacific, whose combined protest resulted in Le'auga's early release. While Brandeis had enacted the poll tax to undermine competing Western agents of capitalism, he “could not afford to ignore the opinion of [these] powers, who... [had] demonstrated an equal capacity for military intervention” (Linnekin, 545) in the past.

In light of this sentiment, Brandeis retorted that a mission teacher, of all people, “should know that the land he resided on belonged to the village and that he had no individual right to its proceeds” (Linnekin, 545). This statement in turn offsets the notion of Western individualism,

further sinking Brandeis into a contradictory web that led to the Tamasese-Brandeis regime's eventual downfall.

While the teacher's arrest somewhat ridiculously illustrates the "complex and contested entanglements between indigenous people and mutually competitive agents of capitalism" (Linnekin, 539), Sāmoans were not simple "victims" of Western domination. Here, I believe, the importance of customary land retention cannot be overstressed. Because Sāmoans still retained the majority of their land, their "indebtedness" gave them an ironic "form of leverage against Western political-economic interests" (Linnekin, 539).

In the context of Sāmoan customary land retention, the dialectic between constructed deadlines and quotas of Western firms and Sāmoan debt repayment in the form of copra *still* gave Sāmoans the upper hand. Debt is a completely abstract, Western, almost ethereal construct, nonexistent in the *fa'aSāmoa*. Of course, a "cultural and ideological system is particularly problematic in historical terms" when speculating "whether, when, and to what extent Sāmoans participated in the Western construct of the 'debt' and internalized a sense of obligation to repay" (Linnekin, 548). However, the Western firms remained more dependent upon the concrete amounts of copra the Sāmoans produced, rather than the Sāmoans being dependent upon the firm's dictate over the payment progress on their loan. In short, in the absence of land as collateral, Sāmoans had little to lose in the case of simple copra debts, and often never repaid their debt at all.

This is not to say that failure to repay debts went uncontested from a Western perspective. In one instance, Brandeis threatened to declare war upon two villages near Pago

Pago Bay in Tutuila, and exile their chiefs if they failed to make their payments (Gray, 8). An additional complication was the LMS missionaries' concern that the poll tax would compete with Sāmoan church contributions. The English missionary James Newell wrote to the British consul requesting an extension for students at the Malua seminary, to which Brandeis swiftly replied, “not at all” (Newell, 207).

The poll tax ultimately proved self-defeating for the Tamasese-Brandeis regime, and Sāmoa was consumed once more in civil war. The period of Tamasese-Brandeis rule, however, provides a compelling case for the efficacy of “indigenous resistance... particularly on the local level” (Linnekin, 540) to competing agents of capitalism. It is also my belief that, once again, resistance to foreign domination – as was originally the case with the defeat of the Tongan *pologa* – led to a “heightened awareness” (Linnekin, 554) of the *fa'aSāmoa* among Sāmoans. Additionally, the aforementioned adoption of many Christian tenets into the *fa'aSāmoa*, enabled Sāmoans to view debts – just like imperialism – as un-Christian.

### **Overthrow**

Unrest mounted as the Brandeis-Tamasese regime spun itself into an increasingly tangled web of coercive measures, taxes and laws. The final straw for the high chiefs of *Tumua* and *Pule* – who had the only traditional right to bestow paramount titles – was when Tamasese began signing his proclamation “Tuiaana Tuiatua Tamasese o le Tupu”, thereby laying false claim to

the titles of the A'ana and Atua districts. The Atua district was so enraged that “German naval intervention was required and several chiefs were imprisoned” (Linnekin, 549)<sup>43</sup>.

The *Tumua* and *Pule* collectively issued an itemized list of grievances, cruelties and injustices suffered at the hands of the Tamasese-Brandeis regime. The list – “*O le tala i mea ua faia*” (the story of what has happened) (Linnekin, 549) – included the unlawful appointment of governors and judges, “sentences of hard labor meted out to chiefs, banishments and deportations without trial, heavy taxation”, and most importantly, the forbidding of debt repayment to non-German firms, and the threat of imprisonment if this rule was broken.

So widespread was the opposition that even Sāmoan officials within the regime were signatories to the document, which ended with the words, “we can no longer endure the cruelty of Tamasese-Brandeis... We are completely fed up and opposed to those two and the things they have done” (Linnekin, 549). In the absence of Malietoa Laupepa, who at this time was still in exile, Mata'afa Iosefo assumed the title from Atua and the recently vacated Malietoa title. As Tamasese's main rival, Mata'afa quickly gained both British and American backing, as well as a stronger Sāmoan backing than Tamasese had ever enjoyed.

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<sup>43</sup> By this time, the Gato'aitele and Tamasoali'i paramount titles had lost considerable clout, and were replaced in importance by the Mata'afa title.



**Figure 25. Mata’afa Iosefo (standing), surrounded by key supporters (Smith, NLNZ).**

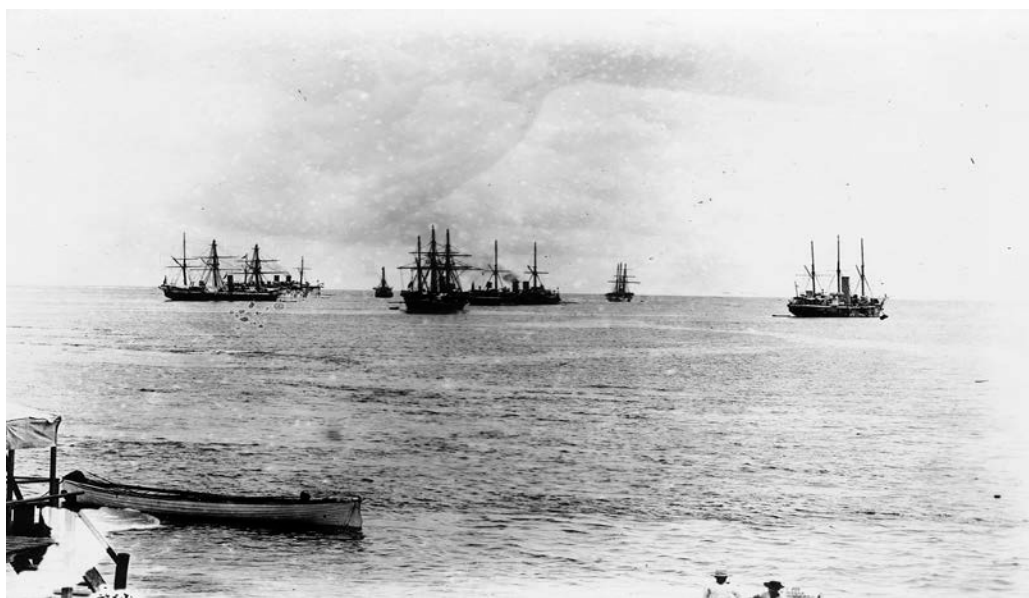
Even so, another civil war broke out in September of 1888<sup>44</sup>, with each Sāmoan faction armed by their foreign partisans, and Mata’afa’s militia was attacked by “a German naval force” (Keesing, 69). During the bloody revolt that followed, “foreign citizens and property suffered unprecedented losses” (Linnekin, 552), and several German marines “actively engaged on Tamasese’s behalf... were killed” (Linnekin, 550). Eventually, Apia was declared a neutral zone: “a safe haven for foreigners and their property” (Linnekin, 552) – (of prime importance to the *palagis*). Not yet willing to admit defeat, the Brandeis-Tamasese government abandoned Mulinu’u for a village inland in October, but for all intents and purposes, the regime had been vanquished.

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<sup>44</sup> Mormon missionaries arrived around the same time, and although initially “shocked” at the apparent state of “native anarchy”, were successfully in converting a small Sāmoan following (Keesing, Holmes).

### Providential Punishment

Sāmoan factional fighting continued, finally prompting all three powers – Germany, Britain and the United States – to station warships in the Apia harbor. There were three German warships, the *Adler*, *Eber* and *Olga*; three American, *Vandalia*, *Trenton* and *Nipsic*; and one British, *Calliope*. Although all seven ships were crammed into the small Apia harbor, “among the officers and ships' companies, life was convivial; they preferred to do their fighting *through* the Sāmoans” (Field, 24). But by March, 1889, the civil war had intensified to a point that the three powers received telegrams from their respective consulates to wage naval warfare against each other.



**Figure 26. European warships in Apia harbor, March 1889 (adapted from Field, 1984).**

On March 15<sup>th</sup>, on the very eve of war, “the barometer began to fall, and while there was no wind”, heavy rain began, setting the scene “for what was to be a great naval disaster” (Field, 24). Gale storm winds descended upon Apia harbor in the dead of night, and all maritime-hell broke loose. *Eber* struck a reef first and sank all seventy-four sailors to their deaths. The *Adler* came unanchored next, killing twenty of its men. The *Calliope* was the only ship that managed to escape the harbor unscathed. The ship returned to the harbor three days later, by which time the other 6 warships were fully sunk, and a total of 146 sailors had drowned (Field, 24).

The hurricane was something of a nail in the coffin for the three *palagi* powers, none of which wanted to spend the effort and capital resources to “rule” Sāmoa as a colony. Even so, each nation feared the consequences of ceding power to the rival country. As the three powers retreated from Sāmoa to lick their wounds, a conference in Berlin was arranged. The hurricane was hailed by Sāmoans as “providential punishment” (Holmes, 21)... and the lesson “was that in the future, when plotting action likely to upset the big powers, [Sāmoans] should do it in the hurricane season” (Field, 25).

### **1889 Tridominium: Berlin Sāmoan Act**

The hurricane prompted an international conference in Berlin, convened in June 1889, by the three Western powers to restore the “status quo” to Sāmoa's political future (Kennedy, 89). My detailing of Sāmoan history up until this point hopefully shows that there was in fact *no* status quo or power equivalence, and that instead Germany had the largest stake in the islands,

but the outcome of the conference was that the Western powers were to “resume the three-power equivalence that existed before the war” (Blaine, 1), in other words: the *palagi* status quo.

The conference, and its subsequent, constructed results, was yet another example of and further creation of reality defined through a *palagi* experience. The resultant treaty not only reified *palagi* conceptions, misconceptions and priorities about Sāmoa, but also served to strengthen and justify power imbalances by constructing Sāmoans as inferior: humans incapable of participating in determining their own identities and destinies.

This “power equivalence” was constructed out of Herbert Bismarck’s – the German Foreign Secretary – intention to “throw up the sponge at the conference, and abandon the idea of German predominance at Sāmoa” (Kennedy, 89). He saw the ongoing factional strife and resultant political instability as outweighing the island’s export potential. One of Bismarck’s famous lines regarding his policy on German colonial expansion was “colonies demand a fatherland in which the national feeling is stronger than the hatred of the [national] parties [for each other]” (Kennedy, 89). Seeing no end to the imperial squabble, Bismarck was willing to “sweeten the pill for the United States” (Kennedy, 89), by unequivocally offering the island of Tutuila to the U. S. Navy, giving them unfettered access to the “coaling station rights at Pago Pago, which they would now be able to enjoy exclusively” (Kennedy, 89).

Given the concurrent colonial contestations between Britain and Germany in other parts of the world, Britain’s delegate, Lord Salisbury, was deeply skeptical of a tripartite treaty. In reference to Bismarck, Salisbury remarked that “only by laying a submarine cable from

Auckland to the islands could they get rid “of the *furor consularis*” (Kennedy, 90). Despite the skepticism, the Final Act of the Berlin Sāmoan conference was signed at the *Auswärtiges Amt* by the plenipotentiaries on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1889 (Kennedy, 94). However, an immediate implementation of the act was delayed because the United States Senate was out, and did not discuss and ratify the agreement until April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1890 (Kennedy, 98).

Sāmoa was thenceforth recognized as “neutral territory in which the citizens and subjects of the three signatory powers [had] equal rights of residence, trade and personal protection” (King, 59). In effect, this meant that Sāmoa was a quasi-independent state, with Apia maintained as an autonomous haven for foreign capital and political interests. The treaty resulted in the creation of a Supreme Court, presided over by a *palagi* Chief Justice appointed by the Western powers, who was to act as a “sort of international referee” (Keesing, 70), or “umpire in determining the future monarchical elections where the natives could not agree upon one candidate” (Kennedy, 93). Also, under Article I of the Act, the Western powers recognized “the free right of the natives to elect their own chief or king according to their own laws and customs” (Keesing, 70). The treaty also banned the continued importation and sale of “arms, ammunition and intoxicating liquors - but only for the natives themselves” (Kennedy, 91).

The most important component of the tripartite treaty was its approach to land. In retrospect, the treaty’s approach to land was historically rare, and might even be seen as counterintuitive for colonial policy. The three nations “swiftly agreed that further land sales by the natives should be prohibited” (Kennedy, 91). A special land titles court was established, over which the Chief Justice had final say, so that Sāmoans could “be represented in this matter by an

advocate” (Kennedy, 91). This approach to land tenure had the inadvertent effect of strengthening Sāmoan customary land retention, although the real motive behind the act was an inter-colonial stalemate tactic whereby each nation attempted to prevent the others from acquiring a land monopoly. In effect, the Sāmoans maneuvered the *palagis* into a stalemate that guaranteed retention of customary land.

All land acquired by the West in a “customary and regular manner” before August 28<sup>th</sup>, 1879 was recognized as legal (Kennedy, 91). This agreement was considerably corrupt and biased in favor of the DHPG, as virtually all of Weber’s dubious land acquisitions were overlooked and declared legal. Conversely, however, all British land claims prior to 1879 were thrown out, leaving the DHPG monopoly intact. Despite the inter-European slights-of-hand, Sāmoans regained legal control of large swaths of customary land that had recently been – again, fictitiously – traded off during the overthrow of the Tamasese-Brandeis regime. Of the three *palagi* powers, Germany retained the upper hand, but at the cost of agreeing to not appropriate any further Sāmoan land.

In an unprecedented act of Western cooperation, the DHPG made a “business arrangement” with their largest competitor, the British McArthur firm, to fix the price of copra. Combined, the two firms controlled over two thirds of the local trade<sup>45</sup>. And although individual traders continued to undermine Sāmoans by attempting to cheat the scales or pay less than the fixed price, Sāmoans were not powerless in these transactions, and developed “counterstrategies,

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<sup>45</sup> However, the D.H.P.G. had lost 400,000 marks worth of goods and produce in the “1888-89 disturbances and was not in a very healthy position despite the managerial reorganization of 1890” (Kennedy, 106).

once again using debts to their own advantage as far as possible and playing traders off against one another” (Linnekin, 551).

However, Mata’afa was widely recognized as the *Tafa’ifā* by many of the Sāmoan districts at this point. Mata’afa was not as swayed by German courting, and refused to bend to the will of the West, attempting to establish a Sāmoan government unwed to foreign interests. Given Mata’afa’s opposition to imperial rule, Germany would not recognize him as *Tafa’ifā*, while on the other hand, Britain and America would not recognize Tamasese, “whom they thought a German puppet” (Meleisa, xiv). Also, Mata’afa was a Catholic, a “minority faith in Sāmoa at a time when Protestant prejudice against ‘Popery’ was vehement” (Meleisa, xv).

Malietoa Laupepa was the candidate of compromise, and was returned from a “grim exile”, first in the Marshall Islands, then in the German colony of the Cameroons, and finally in solitary confinement in Germany (Keesing, 69, Field, 25), and was proclaimed king in 1890. Despite the new German backing, Laupepa was “greatly weakened [from his exile]... and very willingly resigned the kingship to Mata’afa at a large native assembly, which met in early October” (Kennedy, 99). However, the death of Tupua Tamasese Titimea in June of 1892, provoked Laupepa to once more enter into a violent titular dispute over Tamasese’s recently vacated Tuia’ana title (Field, 25). This conjuncture of multiple titular disputes sowed the seeds of Sāmoa’s longest, bloodiest civil war, which broke out in 1892 shortly after Tamasese’s death. For a time, Mata’afa’s forces overpowered Laupepa, and he assumed the “kingship”.



**Figure 27. Malietoa Laupepa (seated, in white) at the reading of the Berlin Sāmoan Act (Smith, NLNZ).**

Malietoa made a shrewd political decision to accept support from Germany, who had so recently forced him into exile. His German-backed militia drove Mata'afa's party to the small island of Manono, in between Upolu and Savai'i in April, 1893. Initially hindered by a tumultuous year of hurricanes, a German warship eventually captured Mata'afa, and exiled him, along with his main supporters, to the Union Islands, and then to Jaluit in the Marshalls Islands (Kennedy, 102).

Factional strife amongst the Sāmoans was “not crushed by the deportation of Mata'afa, although the A'ana and Atua districts were naturally depressed by the loss of their leader”

(Kennedy, 102). Following Mata'afa's deportation, for the first time in the history of *palagi* in Sāmoa, all three Western powers threw their “unanimous support of the treaty powers for Malietoa” (Kennedy, 102). Of all the criticism from the West of the Sāmoans' failure to present a united front, up to this point the West had been equally ineffective at presenting one as well.

## Chapter VI.

### Conclusion

#### *Ua Tini Pā'o Le Uto*

(We have plucked the fishing float over the finish line)

Sāmoan history obliterates the myth of uniformity often portrayed in Western narratives of religious conversion, colonial expansion or linear capitalist accumulation and development. The reflexively defensive cultural memory embedded within the *fa'aSāmoa* constructed a decentralized and horizontally-structured indigenous political organization, with extreme barriers placed in the way of centralization. This formation, initially in resistance to the Tongan Maritime Chiefdom's *pologa*, was later strengthened by Sāmoan maneuvering around and thwarting of permanent Western imperial domination of Sāmoa.

The *fa'aSāmoa* has persevered with consistent resilience in the face of a foreign presence attempting to assert domination and hegemony. The initial, violent encounter on the beach at Fagasā between Sāmoan s and French sailors branded the archipelago as a place to be avoided for the next four decades. This stigmatization and resultant *palagi* avoidance of the island chain allowed Sāmoans enough time to hear about the devastating effects of missionaries in Tahiti and the loss of land and cultural autonomy in Hawaii, and thus to be understandably wary of the arrival of Tongan Wesleyans and later the London Missionary Society.

The combination of Nāfanua’s prophecy, Malietoa Vainu’upō’s victory in the War of A’ana and attainment of the *Tafa’ifā* title, and Faueā’s familial connection to Malietoa Vainu’upō which led him to advise Williams to first arrive in the village of Sapapāli’i, resulted in a seemingly supreme conjuncture. The LMS quickly gained national recognition with the support of Malietoa Vainu’upō, the apparent heir of the “kingdom of heaven”.

In addition to the confluence of events that culminated in the arrival of Christianity, the manner in which Christianity was introduced and assimilated were also of utmost importance. The fact that the arrival of missionary and imperial powers were *not* synonymous – as in Hawaii and Tahiti – afforded Sāmoa s not only enough time to adapt Christianity into their pre-existing spiritual belief system, but to also have the theoretical lens through which to view the later arrival of imperial powers as “un-Christian”.

Before the Sāmoanization of Christianity, titular disputes had sometimes been resolved through warfare, resulting in two factions: the *mālō* (victors) and the *vaivai* (vanquished). With the adoption of Christianity’s tenet that war is a sin, this traditional order was dissolved, thus complicating the resolution of titular disputes. The complication later proved ironically beneficial from a Sāmoan point of view. Western powers were consistently unsuccessful in constructing a “puppet” king through which to claim legitimacy and assert political domination.

From a Western perspective, Sāmoan resistance to imperial domination occurred in a myriad of almost indiscernible acts. Sāmoans were able to play rival imperial powers off one another, while often simultaneously promoting their own political agenda. Through the

ultimately fictional sale of land, resistance to debt repayment and seemingly endless titular-disputes, Sāmoans gained subtle forms of leverage against the West.

Within the *fa'aSāmoa*, identities were forged through allegiance to the *'aiga*, with merit ascribed to self-effacing service to the greater good instead of individual wealth accumulation. Sāmoans' assumption of cultural superiority clashed with *palagi* ideals of individualism and centralization. These powerful cultural forces, combined with resistance to indentured labor, and successful customary land retention all mitigated against capitulation to servitude, loss of autonomy, land, language, and culture, or conversion to a capitalist society.

Sāmoa's relational geography and uniquely complex history left the jockeying Western nations – Germany, America and Britain – unwilling to pour enough military or political resources into exerting successful domination over Sāmoa. The ongoing imperial stalemate resulted in numerous Acts and Treaties – signed amongst the Western nations and also signed between Sāmoans and the West – that consistently resulted in continued, if not aggravated political unrest.

My telling of Sāmoan history concludes just prior to 1900, when, after prolonged imperial frustration, the United States and Britain ceded political control to Germany, and Sāmoa became a German colony: the first official colonial “acquisition” of Sāmoa by a colonial power. Almost a century of exposure to the West had equipped Sāmoans with both the concrete and theoretical political savvy to continue resistance to colonial domination and hegemony. Out of the intricate, unique and dialectical past, at the time of colonial partitioning of the archipelago,

Sāmoans had successfully retained their land, language, culture, way of life and pride. Resistance to colonialism continued and intensified into the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the subject of my further work. The dialectical confluence of the *fa'aSāmoa* with Christianity, Western imperialism and successful resistance to attempted hegemonic domination resulted in a meeting up of histories: the multiplicities of trajectories that, once combined, *become one in the basin of the waterfall.*

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