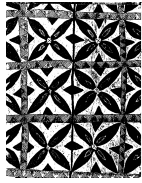


THE WEIGHT OF NAMES IN AMERICAN SAMOA¹



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Across the Samoan islands, a system of chiefs with ranked titles or names organizes political action. At a chiefly installation ceremony that took place in American Samoa in 2006, through a process of intertextual allusion, a brief verbal exchange served to index political alliances and relationships of the *longue durée* that existed in the Samoan islands before 1900. Old court records reveal how American colonial policies and practices changed the balance between chiefly titles. Today, the repetition of proper names, as tokens, references a mnemonic structure that positions Samoan political actors across time and space. The chiefs of American Samoa are constantly weighing their relationships with independent Samoa and the United States. On the one hand, the chiefs maintain a distinction between their titles and those of independent Samoa, and on the other hand they do not want full incorporation into the United States for fear that their communal land system will be privatized and alienated. The structure of titles and alliances provides a template of possibilities for political actors, but the system seems to turn back to basic principles when faced with uncertainties about island political life. (American Samoa, interdiscursivity, mnemonic structures)

The political actors of American Samoa walk a fine line between traditional and Western systems of governance, and between independent Samoa and the United States. This article focuses on an installation ceremony's role in the traditional political structure of Samoan chiefs. Through a process of intertextual allusion, a brief verbal exchange during a ceremony in 2006 serves to index political alliances of the *longue durée* that stretched across the Samoan islands before 1900. These spatiotemporal references to alliances reveal colonial intrusions in Samoan politics. In the speech event, tensions inherent in the Samoan political structure are exacerbated by historical developments in American Samoa.

Across the Samoan islands, a political-kinship system (*faamatai*) of chiefs with ranked titles or names structures political action (Gilson 1970; Shore 1982; Tcherkézoff 1993, 2005). The titles are linked through once extensive alliance networks, but are now altered by colonial policies. The structural logic of the Samoan *faamatai* and its contemporary potential for transformation has been discussed thoroughly by Tcherkézoff (2005). It includes the extended family group, headed by a *matai*, who determines use of the land and its resources. Virtually all the major ethnographies have commented on the *matai* system in the twentieth century, thereby giving chronological benchmarks across the century.² The present article highlights developments in the islands of American Samoa.

The principles of Samoan power relations described by Shore (1982) remain fundamentally accurate today. Several aspects are relevant for understanding the context of the ceremony described later. First, power balancing is deeply embedded in Samoan culture and this love of balance and symmetry is reflected in Samoan arts, crafts, and dance (Keesing 1956:112–13; Shore 1982:232). The “game” in Samoan politics,

according to Keesing (1934:212, 1956:113), is to maneuver the power blocks into harmony, often through oratory, a vital force in political relations (Duranti 1994).

Second, the Samoan concept of authority (*pule*) is not only power over others, it is also the right to perform a public function on behalf of others (Gilson 1970:55). The dual nature of authority relies on a distinction between two kinds of chiefs: one is the *ali'i* chiefs with sacred authority, and the other is the *tulāfale* (orator) chiefs with the authority of doing, of acting on behalf of the *ali'i* (Shore 1982; Tcherkézoff 1993, 2005). Stability in political relations is achieved through complementary relationships, as between the *ali'i* and *tulāfale*, where the proper mode of behavior is mutual respect, whereas symmetrical relationships, as between equals, are marked by competition and instability (Shore 1982:208–20). These principles form a Samoan template for political action that includes a dynamic aspect with the potential for change, the orators, combined with a stable aspect that provides a sense of continuity over time in political life, the *ali'i* (Shore 1982:222). Relationships, not objects or isolated practices, define continuity for Samoans (Shore 1982:283). The discussion described in this article is concerned with chiefly statuses, power balancing, and relationships over time.

Graeber (2001:88) has reworked Appadurai's (1986) phrase "the politics of value" to define meaningful political action. Graeber highlights the fact that regardless of the structure of social relations, power gains meaning and value when enacted in cooperation with others (Graeber 2001:260). The enactment of power may involve spatiotemporal symbols and references (Munn 1986, 1996), mnemonic systems with paradigmatic and syntagmatic messages (Valeri 1990), and titles and names (Graeber 2001), which create the possibilities for political action. In this article, a speech event emphasizes the temporal dimension of Samoan political discourse, where a debate between two orators about the authority to act on behalf of the *ali'i* refers to previous discourses about titles and alliances and draws them together within the same chronotopic frame (Silverstein 2005). The discourse, along with information from court records, demonstrates how political actors draw on past relationships.

The installation of Paramount Chief Tuitele took place in 2006 on the island of Tutuila. The ceremony was a public display of *faamatai* and, borrowing the concepts of Lévi-Strauss (1969:481), it was a display of "periodic exchange" and "omnipresent structure"; i.e., the installation ceremony revealed the logic of a Samoan political structure combining kinship, politics, and land. The political structure was based on alliances, often through marriage, that could evolve in complicated and unforeseen ways (Gilson 1970:58, 62, 63). An examination of transformations in land use and allocation practices in Rapa, French Polynesia, over the last hundred years reveals that, despite major changes in population and land use, certain central ideas ("imminent principles") reassert themselves in contemporary land decisions, which suggests that a "reversal" is taking place in the system (Hanson and Ghasarian 2007:69). In other words, traditional principles continue to organize action regarding land rights in Rapa despite major changes over the century. In American Samoa, the discussion between the two high orator chiefs indexes an omnipresent political-kinship structure that predates 1900. While the structure has changed, often as a result of American law, sometimes leaving only the names of former important alliances, a mnemonic framework (*fa'alupega*)

which lists the ranking of the titles, continues to organize political relationships. Discursive practices and circulating discourse (Urban 2001) are effective in maintaining the mnemonic framework. Each time the titles and names of alliances are used in discourse, they index the ranking and discourse from some other occasion, thus drawing the occasions together across time and space (Irving 1996:135, Silverstein 2005:6). Nevertheless, changes during the past century are evident in the speech event.

According to Shore (1982) and Leacock (1988), there was remarkable cultural homogeneity across the Samoan islands at the time of their fieldwork in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, it seems that a split between the two Samoan territories is growing wider, even though the Governor of American Samoa refers to all Samoans as brothers in his speeches. The political system of faamatai is complicated by the division of the islands. Tutuila and the Manu'a group (Ta'u, Olesega, and Ofu) were ceded to the United States in 1900 and are a U.S. territory on the U.N.'s list of colonies. The western islands of Upolu, Savai'i and Manono (and a few smaller islands) were a German colony in 1900. In 1914, a New Zealand military and administration took over, and after 1921 New Zealand ruled by mandate under the League of Nations and the U.N. Western Samoa was granted independence in 1962.

Titles in American Samoa are connected to titles in independent Samoa. However, after 1900, the chiefs of Tutuila were in a new and ambiguous position within the pan-Samoan polity, as the hierarchy of titles shifted when some chiefs increased their status through interactions with the Americans. In the 1950s, as Western Samoa was moving toward independence, there were discussions about reuniting the Samoan islands as an independent state. The title holders in Tutuila, however, were not willing to do so because they held junior titles. During these discussions, Western Samoa did not negotiate or reconsider the rank of Tutuila's titles (Keesing 1956:252). The Manu'a titleholders were not interested in uniting, since they considered themselves to be relatively independent and on par with the highest titles of Sā Malietoa and Sā Tupua (see the hierarchy chart in Keesing 1956:22). As the Keesings (1956:252) predicted, the eastern and western islands did not reconcile the differences in title rankings. The chiefs of American Samoa continue to prefer their alliance with the United States.

The political relationship with the U.S. frames island life and distinguishes the American territory from independent Samoa, despite the facts that all Samoans have kinship ties and a large percentage of the population of American Samoa was born in independent Samoa. Periodically, American Samoans debate their political status vis-à-vis the United States (Sunia 1983). One of these debates took place in 2006. As part of the review, an American Samoan commission weighed various possibilities and presented them to the public. In two public debates on the island of Tutuila, there were some (usually young) people who favored incorporation with the United States, either as a state or as a commonwealth. All views were considered in these meetings, with participation from the audience, but at the end of the meetings consensus was reached about the need to preserve, in one repeated phrase, "our land and titles." The commission's final report recommended that American Samoa keep its current status as an unincorporated territory of the United States. At present, American Samoa is governed

by the local American Samoan Government as part of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

There has been a constant Samoan discourse on the laws and codes of government in American Samoa during the twentieth century (Sunia 1983). Parallelism, in the repetition of different words or phrases to convey the same concept, is used commonly in Samoan oratory for restating distinctions in social structure (Duranti 1994:227), and persists as American Samoans continually interpret or restate American codes and laws.

American Samoa inhabits a political “gray area” (Chappell 2000) between colony and independent territory. However, because American Samoans have maintained the political structure of chiefly titles that links them to independent Samoa, they have not felt the humiliation or sense of defeat that has been described by other communities that have experienced colonialism (Robbins and Wardlow 2005). After 20 years of research in both Samoan groups, the Keesings (1956:184) wrote, “Samoans show no humility in dealing with outsiders.” While changes in Samoan economy and lifestyle are rapid and obvious, they seem not to be important in the transformation of the title system and are easily integrated into faamatai (Tcherkézoff 2005:279). Faamatai allows American Samoans to identify themselves as Americans. The chiefs of American Samoa do not try to unite with independent Samoa because of the ranking of titles, and they do not move for full incorporation into the United States for fear that their communal land will become privatized and alienated. American Samoa may prefer an independent status in association with the United States, as has happened with other American Pacific territories, but money promised as part of President Obama’s economic stimulus plan is a strong incentive to maintain ties with the U.S. Nonetheless, there are always fears about the loss of autonomy, as with the issue of immigration, and the Governor has announced that a Constitutional Convention will open in June 2010.

As a signifier, the expression “our land and titles” means different things to different people but always refers to *fa’a-Sāmoa*, the Samoan way of doing things. *Fa’a-Sāmoa* is often in the background of circulating discourse while new trends are in the foreground, as with talk about immigration, in the negative reaction to students performing urban dance styles during Flag Day, on occasions when people are encouraged not to spend too much on gifts during ceremonies or on tithes to the church, and in criticisms of the chiefs and their activities. *Fa’a-Sāmoa* is characterized by a great deal of ideological diversity. Different sites and different events offer opportunities for emphasizing modernity or tradition, or the tension between the two. The installation ceremony is a site of tradition, a location for the enactment of *fa’a-Sāmoa*.

ALLIANCES AND SAMOAN POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The basic unit of social organization in Samoa is the village (*nu’u*), and within the village the basic unit of organization is the ‘*aiga*, an extended family group with a wide membership based on descent, adoption, and marriage. At the head of each ‘*aiga* is the matai, whose title or name carries with it authority over land and resources used by the ‘*aiga*. The matai was responsible for managing the family’s lands, organizing the work force (especially the labor of the untitled members who owed service to the ‘*aiga*),

looking after the welfare of the group, and representing the ‘aiga in the village council (*fono*). This was in place in the early twentieth century (Mead 1930), but by 1950, with the advent of wage labor, the matai control over labor weakened (Nayacakalou 1960). The matai continues to speak for the ‘aiga and represent its interests in the village council (Duranti 1981, 1984, 1994; Shore 1982; Tcherkézoff 2005:260). Control over the land and communal resources of the ‘aiga remain important and any change towards private property is resisted. Authority over land is the particular symbol of authority of the matai, and weakening of any symbol of the ‘aiga’s status affects the entire social structure. Therefore, authority over the land is a very closely guarded right of the matai title (Nayacakalou 1960:115).

Before the advent of colonial rule, which placed all the villages more or less at the same level, there was a difference between local matai, as heads of families, and supra-local ali’i, as chiefs, and tulāfale (Tcherkézoff 2000:172). The ali’i, a sacred chief, was the embodiment of the founding ancestors and part of a class recognized across Polynesia (Tcherkézoff 2000:178; Kirch and Green 2001:208–18). An important orator (tulāfale) was attached to an ali’i and served his ali’i (Gilson 1970:24–25; Shore 1982; Tcherkézoff 1993:61).

The ali’i and high ranking tulāfale were part of regional hierarchies at the district and, sometimes, island level (Meleiseā 1995:22–24). “In the nineteenth century there were recognized district and sub-district alignments organized in a hierarchy of power and ceremonial alliances. Each unit had a name, a ceremonial center, and a particular status and role in political affairs” (Keesing 1956:21) and each sub-district was oriented toward a maximal title (Gilson 1970:52). The matai operated at the village level while the ali’i and high tulāfale were the political and ritual heads of extended kin networks in districts (*itumalō*) consisting of numerous villages. As the name *itumalō* indicates, the districts were formed by alliances from a *malō*, or victory in war (Tcherkézoff 2000:153). The ali’i or tulāfale, whose power was in the *itumalō*, had no authority over the land of the district; his authority remained only over the land and resources of his ‘aiga. But, as members of the *itumalō*, the ali’i and tulāfale were at the center of a system of vast alliances (Tcherkézoff 2000:153).

By the end of the nineteenth century there were alliances of orators, called by terms like the “Nine Houses,” the “Six Houses,” and so on, according to local custom throughout Samoa. These orator groups were in charge of choosing and bestowing high ali’i titles, and so were very powerful (Krämer, cited in Tcherkézoff 2000:163). Two orator alliances (*Tāmua* on Upolu and *Pule* on Savai’i) were involved in political maneuvering with British, German, and American interests (Gilson 1970; Keesing 1956; Meleiseā 1987; Vaai 2001). Through membership in these groups, some orators exercised greater authority than ali’i chiefs (Malaise 1987:19).³

Another form of political organization, the *Alataua* (or its honorific form, *Lealataua*), was found in selective villages throughout the island group in the nineteenth century. Gilson (1970:26–27) and Shore (1982:26) refer to them as having priestly functions. Krämer (1994:658) defined their activities during the 1890s:

Alataua—an office in certain districts on the individual islands. In olden days they were keepers of traditions and pedigrees and always had to be consulted in the case of portentous decisions and gatherings

of the principal places. It is also their privilege to leave a fono not having uttered a word and subsequently criticize the decision and submit it for additional considerations. It is a fact that the Alataua were once much more powerful and that they have at present lost much status and influence. . . . [T]he principal power of the Alataua may well have been theirs due to their relationships with the gods from whom they obtained counsel.

According to Krämer (1994:658), the Alataua was found at Satupaitea and the combined village of Neiafu-Falelima-Tufutafoe on Savai'i, at Safata on Upolu, and at Leone and Aoa on Tutuila. Unasa Va'a (personal communication) offered his understanding of Lealataua:

I believe that the name started in Safata . . . when High Chief Malietoa appointed his brother Fata as his councilor in war (in effect, chief of staff) to reside at Safata in Upolu. From Safata the Lealataua function was extended to Savai'i, either granted as a privilege to that particular district, or as a result of marriage. Then later, it was extended further to Tutuila, through the same process. So in effect, . . . there is a common origin and network. In politics, these Alataua districts often come together as allies. . . . Lealataua literally means advice relating to conducting a war (le ala = way, taua = war). And wars were common in the old days, mainly over titles and lands.

In 1900, the American and German colonial governments moved to centralize and control these shifting alliances and power centers. An early step taken by both powers disenfranchised the powerful orator groups. (Keesing 1956:24)⁴

Although Krämer writes that the Alataua had limited power in the 1890s, the colonial governments in both Samoas used the existing district and sub-district alliances, and their elite groupings, as the basis for their administrative units (Keesing 1956:21). American Samoa was made into three districts and 14 subdistricts, called counties. *Falelima* was a traditional alliance of five chiefs in eastern and western Tutuila and the term is still used for both districts, with the eastern and western distinction. The Alataua in American Samoa have been transformed from a sociopolitical force to a geopolitical designation. Today Lealataua is a county in the Western District (*Falelima Sisifo*) of Tutuila, although its status and role in the political affairs of its ceremonial center, Leone, is still being discussed.

The position of the ali'i and high ranking tulāfale changed between 1890 and 1920 when the colonial governments in both Samoas began to refer to everyone as matai (Tcherkézoff 2000:156), and was evident in Mead's (1930:12) study. According to Tcherkézoff (2000:154), "It is the only case throughout Polynesia, in the present or in the past, where the ali'i as a group is encompassed in a broader class." In both Samoas after 1900 the colonial government preferred to appoint ali'i chiefs to political positions and the orator chiefs were often left out (Keesing 1934:162). In American Samoa, an early ruling stated that no orator was eligible to become the village mayor (who worked with the Navy) or eligible for the office of chief. The preference for working with ali'i chiefs in both governments led to problems; it made the ali'i chiefs leaders for practical action that they had no experience with and that often clashed with their sacred status (Keesing 1934:162). Changing the position of the orators disrupted the balance in the system and became a point of contention between the Leone chiefs and the American Navy government in the early days of the colony. In time, the Tutuila orators regained

some of their high status and influence, although they lost the power to appoint high titles (Keesing 1956:206).

THE INSTALLATION CEREMONY

The Paramount Chief title of Tuitele belongs to one of the “great kin alignments” of Samoa (Keesing 1956:22), with its political and ceremonial center in the village of Leone on Tutuila. The Leiato title, vacant for several years, is the other great kin alignment on Tutuila, with its ceremonial and political center in Faga’itua village. These Tutuila kin alignments were part of Sā Tupua, one of the two “great series of kin and district alignments” (Keesing 1956:21), the other being Sā Malietoa. A third title, largely independent and with ceremonial seniority, was the Tuimanu’a,⁵ with its ceremonial center in Manu’a on Ta’ū. Sā Malietoa and Sā Tupua still fill the top positions in government in independent Samoa.

The title of Tuitele had been vacant since the death of the previous Tuitele in 1992. This time lag in deciding a new title holder is common in American Samoa, especially for high titles. The Naval Administration, which was in charge of American Samoa from 1900 until July 1951, wanted to simplify the title system in order to prevent conflict and factionalism (Keesing 1934:212). From the Navy’s point of view, Samoans were paying too much attention to rank and titles and too little to productivity and good governance (Armstrong 2008). While Western Samoa, now independent, continued with the practice of splitting titles among the divisions of the family, the situation in American Samoa was quite different because of the Navy’s rule in 1906 to register all titles and discourage, and later forbid, splitting titles (Keesing 1934:246). One reason for the American control of titles was that the naval government needed to know who it should deal with, and a titleholder’s value to the government became an official criterion for holding the title (Keesing 1934:246). In the 1930s, the number of title cases that came to court in American Samoa was proportionately far greater than in Western Samoa as a result of these rules. At that time, Keesing (1934:236, 245) estimated that 50–75 percent of title decisions were brought to court, and took up much of the case load of the High Court of American Samoa. Keesing (1934) predicted that this control of Samoan titles would result either in an increase in the importance of existing titles, because of its “scarcity value,” or else the system would disintegrate “in a relatively revolutionary fashion” through the self-assertion of non-titled people (Keesing 1934:246). By 2006, Keesing’s prediction about scarcity value seemed to be true, but disintegration had not happened, even though it was part of the discourse about democracy. For the highest titles, the stakes are high and the length of time between holders of high titles is often quite long. The court case (MT 1-99) for the Tuitele title began in 1997, five years after the death of the previous Tuitele; it was tried in January 2006 and the installation took place in October 2006.

The installation ceremony was organized over several months. A large affair, it involved family alliances from all over American Samoa as well as groups from independent Samoa, with whom the Tuitele title had alliances. For two days before the *’ava* ceremony, when the chiefs recognized the new Tuitele, there were many groups

presenting their fine mats and gifts. It was an elaborate display of periodic exchange, and a moment to consolidate alliances.

Tuitele is an ali'i title. In Leone, the high orator titles of Leoso and Olo were called *Le Matua*. They were influential in choosing the holder of the Tuitele title and in running district and regional affairs.⁶ It is always possible for both types of titles to be very influential, depending on personal characteristics, which makes the system flexible. For the exchanges at events like the installation ceremony, the orator uses appropriate honorific language. He must know the proper greetings for all the visiting chiefs according to the order of titles for all the Samoan islands. He must know the proper protocol for receiving the gifts and returning gifts to the visiting groups. In Leone, the Matua should have conducted the installation ceremony for Tuitele. However, in 2006, the Leoso and Olo Matua titles were vacant, as was the Fiu, and another high orator title, Maiava, had only recently been filled by an inexperienced man. Therefore, a high-ranking orator, Tuiagamoā, was asked to be the principal orator, assisted by another senior orator, who was there to give advice. Maiava conducted the smaller exchanges on Wednesday and Thursday, and Tuiagamoā, with the high orator standing next to him and Maiava behind them, conducted the exchanges all day Friday.

On Friday alone, food, cloth, money, and thousands of mats flowed to Tuitele and from Tuitele to the visitors; each group's exchange ended with songs and dances in praise of Tuitele. Everyone was having a good time and often they joked back and forth. The group that came with the U.S. Congressional Representative joked that they had the authority of Washington on their side. During all the good humor, Tuiagamoā had to keep track of goods and rank. To help him with this, a high chief from the family was in charge of keeping a record of what was exchanged. He stood near Tuiagamoā with a clipboard, and there were four people sitting behind him at a table with notebooks in order to know everything that came in and what should be returned.

The exchanges were according to a set order. Gifts were first presented to Tuitele by the visiting group. For example, after sending food, cloth, and mats, one group sent money in envelopes, each containing \$1,000. The visiting orator counted "1, 2," etc., as ten women carried an envelope high overhead to the Tuitele side. "It's all we can come up with," the visiting orator said. After all the gifts were presented, Tuiagamoā returned gifts to the visiting group in the form of food, mats, cloth, and money. He ended by saying, "Anything missing?" The other orator answered, "Yes, two," and more goods were sent. Tuiagamoā asked again, "Any more reverends, any more people?" and the visiting orator joked that always more can be used, and more was given. It is very important that the Tuitele side not be perceived as gaining from these exchanges; in fact, during the course of the installation ceremony, the Tuitele side gave more than it received. The several hundred people attending were served food and drink during the three-day period. As one of the Tuitele family women said, there has to be plenty of food for everyone and she quoted an old Samoan proverb: "rocks may crumble but words never die" (i.e., people will gossip about you if you don't feed them properly).

The exchanges took place Friday, beginning at dawn and ending at around 5 p.m., so the 'ava ceremony could take place before nightfall. Alliances were made obvious in the exchanges, as when the visitors were office colleagues or the family of Tuitele's

wife, or when Manu'a came to show their link to the Tuitele title. In this way, the installation ceremony recreates past alliances and consolidates them through gift exchange. There was no debate about this; everything was done according to protocol. Modern elements were also present. For example, the first gift should be a coconut with a flower in the top. This has been replaced by a can of soda with a dollar bill. So the ceremony replicated the general pattern of installation ceremonies, and at the same time displayed historical changes.

THE FA'ATAU

When the high chiefs moved inside the Tuitele guest *fale*, an open-sided house, for the 'ava ceremony, there was a shift in focus, from "periodic exchange" to "omnipresent structure" (Lévi-Strauss 1969:481). 'Ava ceremonies mark official occasions in Samoan society and in this case, it was held to mark the full recognition of the new Tuitele by a fonu, a council of high chiefs. A chiefly council contains many aspects of semiotic behavior, as where the chiefs sit, their postures, gestures, and tone, all serve to mark status, rank, temporality, and audience (Duranti 1981; Duranti 1984:220; Keating and Duranti 2006:164, 167). The installation ceremony set the frame for the type of speeches (*lāuga*) that would be given and how the audience, watching from outside the fale, would perceive them (Duranti 1994:234). Following customary practice, the chiefs took their positions according to rank, sitting cross-legged along the posts of the open fale. Maiava sat along the back of the house with a few other chiefs and the high status young woman (*taupou*), who prepared the 'ava. Tuitele, and a high chief of Leone sat in a chair at one end of the fale and three high chiefs sat in chairs at the opposite end, the ends of the house being the place for ali'i chiefs. Tuiagamoā began by saying "It's late, don't say any *lāuga*, no long speeches, just bring the 'ava." He was referring to the *folafola* 'ava speech where the orator lists the most important chiefs and the names of the place where their ancestors first established their family compound (Duranti 1981:160). Instead, they began the customary distribution of 'ava branches. This lasted about 10 minutes.

After this, it was time for the orator chiefs to decide who would give the speech that defines and consolidates alliances, and is therefore the climax of the ceremony (Duranti 1981:159). The debate between orators to decide who should give the speech is called the *fa'atau*. On ceremonial occasions the orator may be pre-arranged, but the *fa'atau* is always a point where differences can be aired (Duranti 1981:161). Shore (1982:207) defines it as a competition and Va'a (2001:154, 229) has shown how the *fa'atau* among Samoan migrants in Australia is a moment for re-defining status in the group. In 2006, they debated the rank and participation of alliance groups.

The following is an excerpt of the exchange between two orators, Tuiagamoā and Fagatogo, about who should give the speech. Each elite member speaks publicly on behalf of his group (Keesing 1956:94). This kind of debate is common in a fonu. On this day, however, there were time limits because of the audience and approaching darkness. The talk is full of proper names that index alliance groups; at issue is the absence of the Matua, Leoso, and Olo, and the position of the Alataua in Leone. My explanations are in brackets.⁷

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T: “*Ia o le tatou faatau*,” (“It is time to decide”).

[This is the opening for the talking chiefs to decide who will give the speech; this step in the process is old, according to nineteenth century missionary accounts.]

T: We won’t talk about the village, but who will represent Alataua and Itumalō on the day of Tuitele? [The Leone alliance groups are mentioned immediately.]

F [speaking as a representative of the Alataua]: Thank you for your speech, Tuiagamoā. All the guests are seated. Thank you all the high chiefs of American Samoa. Now you are asking for someone to do the work. Tuiagamoā, you are Itumalō. This is the day I thought to make things lighter [i.e., that we are going to help]. It is a long day from early morning to now. Thank you for all the speeches and all the talk for the morning. But on the occasion, we are asking you to give us a chance. Give Alataua a chance. We are going to try one or two words about the *sua* [the preparations for weeks in advance of this ceremony]—we wanted a chance to work during the last few weeks in preparation for the ceremony. And that’s what we say.

T: Thank you for offering to be the speaker. I don’t agree. I represent the family [*Aitulagi*]. Is it okay for me to do the speech for Tuitele and the Alataua? Tuitele is a matai title not just for the Itumalō and the village; Tuitele is a title of the family. Whatever Tuitele wants, that’s where the family is supposed to be. The *tama* Matua have the respect of the Falelima [*tama* emphasizes the speaker’s respect for the Matua]. Please let me do this.

F: I represent the Matua [Leoso and Olo]. Tuitele is a title in the Alataua. Look, Tuiagamoā, we are supporting the title. The whole time we support your job and cheer your good job [as orator]. The District selected me to represent it. That’s why I think this is the day that I should do the work. I thought you were going to say okay. I am asking again if I can do the work [give the speech].

T: We’re looking at the time. Who wants to do the lāuga? Who, Tautuato’o? [Directed at another orator] Who wants to do the lāuga today?

[Someone answers from the Tautuato’o side]: Lāuga Fagatogo. Let Fagatogo do the lāuga.

T: Tautuato’o agrees, they agree as one and they work together. That’s why you think that Alataua should do something in the ceremony. If you think that, then why are you sitting around and not doing the job [he is referring to distributing the ‘ava branches]. Don’t bring that thought; it won’t make the day smooth. This is not an argument to win but we are thinking about the Tuitele family and the Alataua. There is no Matua—no Olo and Leoso—no one to speak for the District. This family is for Tuitele, this family agrees to work for Tuitele.

F: You are right; there is no Matua and in general the *usu* [alliance, brothers] is all over Samoa. Tuitele is one of the high chiefs of the Falelima. For Samoa in general we have the *fa’alupega* [the ranking is already established there] and the Alataua is in the *fa’alupega*. The Alataua is from Leone all the way to Fagamalo [village]. Those are Alataua words. And that’s what I am saying for now. That’s what it is.

T: Fagatogo, it’s getting late but you still didn’t get the point. What do you mean? Tuitele is one of the high chiefs of the Falelima. Is there another person, anyone higher? No one—only Tuitele. Whatever Tuitele wants, thinks, that’s where we are [we do it]. Olo and Leoso are not here so I represent the family of Aitulagi. I am here for Tuitele. Tuitele is the high chief of the Falelima. [Aitulagi is a large kin network, headed by Tuitele. The Deed of Cession in 1900 was signed by the Western chiefs of Tutuila under the alliance called *Fofo ma Aitulagi* (Gray 1960:117).]

F: Tuiagamoā, the first time this thing happened [since Tuitele got the court ruling], we cannot say anything. This is why it is not easy. Although that is our king, your side is going to do the work. You are looking down on the Alataua by not giving them some work to do and it is not easy to forget. [He is referring to the authority to act on behalf of.]

[Fagatogo addresses the Alataua behind him]: Nothing happened—all Alataua knows that. Okay, Tuiagamoā and Aitulagi family, I give it [the power of the Matua] to you to do the lāuga.

F [turns back to speak to T]: We will cheer [support] you. We will be around if there is anything you need help with. Pray to God to bless the day and whatever will happen. Pray to God that everything runs smoothly for Tuitele’s day, that things go well for Tuitele on this day.

[A high chief sitting at the end of the fale says]: Time, Gentlemen. Respect Tuitele. This is not an easy subject. Please pay your respects to the king.

This lasted about 10 minutes. After this, a few chiefs made comments, and Tuiagamoā made a speech in honor of Tuitele, lasting about 12 minutes. Finally, shouting announced the ‘ava, ‘ava was served, oil was poured over the head of Tuitele to recognize his new status, and the event was over.

No one was challenging the Tuitele title decision. Rather, it was a debate about the authority to act on behalf of the groups and titles in Leone and the Western District of Tutuila, based on the long relations between them. The Keesings (1956:125) argued that decision-making in elite hierarchies can be taken as a significant index of focal values. The debate in 2006 was between two high-ranking orators; a low-ranking chief would not have spoken in this type of ceremonial event. Each high orator was speaking for an alliance group. As is customary, the orator speaking for Alataua did so because the unfilled high orator titles threatened the equilibrium and ranking of the groups. The meeting of high-titled men is the place for a problem of this significance (Keesing 1956:125). It is the appropriate venue for expressing the dimensions of authority and competition among orators and the spatial forum for enacting the possibilities in faamatai.

The speech event was also a moment of interdiscursivity, when proper names, as tokens, index discourse from some previous occasion (Silverstein 2005:6). The names (such as Alataua, Leoso, Falelima, Aitulagi) refer to some unique entity across all possible worlds every time they are used (Silverstein 2005:11). These are proper names of Leone village alliances and titles and they index the chain of events that occurred from the first use of the name (“baptism”) to the present discourse (Silverstein 2005:12). Time is collapsed, there is a back and forth movement through referencing, and past events become coeval with the present.

The repetition of the names, a form of parallelism, restates principals of social structure that had been discussed many times before. Problems of rank in Leone were raised in the courts several times over the century and never resolved to the satisfaction of the orator groups. The Leoso first raised the issue of his position vis-à-vis the Tuitele title in a court case in 1902, again in 1933 and in 1947, and it was apparent again when the Leoso was named Tuitele in 1982. This man was the previous title holder.

TITLE DECISIONS DURING THE LAST CENTURY

The archives of the case records of the High Court of American Samoa and the records kept by the Navy reveal that these issues have a long history and that colonial intrusion into the authority of the chiefs created conflicts in the ranking system. When

the Samoans argued their case in court, they were often trying to explain the principles of their political system to an outside audience, the American judge. What follows is a condensed version of a long debate about titles and rank in Leone. Samoan explanations of the names of titles and alliances are included in early court records and these provide the context for the referencing in the verbal exchange in 2006.

At the time of the earliest court cases, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Tuitele title had begun to split into two branches, a typical occurrence with Samoan titles as families grow larger (Keesing 1934). One branch was organized around the orators Leoso and Olo and the other branch around the orators Maiava and Fiu. A split occurred in the nineteenth century when Leoso named Isaia as Tuitele and Maiava named Toomata. When these two title holders died or turned over the title, Leoso named Sipai and Maiava appointed Penitila, and they held the title concurrently. Sipai died just before the cession papers were signed with the Americans in 1900 and Penitila, who signed the Deed of Cession, died in 1902. Before he died, Penitila named his son, Toomata Salatielu, to succeed him but Salatielu did not want to hold the Tuitele title because he was a founding member of the elite *Fitafita* military guard established in 1900 by the Navy Commander. The family split between the Leoso side and the Toomata side and Leoso named himself as Tuitele and held the ‘ava ceremony for his installation.

Leoso’s action triggered one of the early court cases (National Archives, HC 3-1902), where five title holders, Save, Leoso, Atofau, Maiava, and Toomata, debated their positions relative to each other and relative to the Tuitele title. In his testimony, Leoso (then in his 30s) argued, speaking with the “I” of the title, that he held the Matua, the position of senior orator, “for generations” and that he had the right to name the Tuitele. All agreed that the Leoso name is higher than Maiava and that “Leoso speaks for Alataua.” Maiava said that he was the representative of Leoso if Leoso was not present, and his job was to transmit the business (from Leoso) to Olo and Salavea. Maiava explained, “If Olo agrees, he announces it to Lealataua; if Olo doesn’t, I report it to Leoso.” They agreed that Toomata is higher than Maiava, based on the fact that Toomata is served his ‘ava first, he receives fine mats first, and he rules the lands belonging to the family. They agreed that in Leone an ali’i could hold a tulāfale title and a tulāfale could hold an ali’i title; that is, according to custom, Leoso could hold the Tuitele title (cf. Meleiseā 1987). The judge, a New Zealander who spoke Samoan and was appointed by the Americans, ruled that Save, an old man, should hold the title until he died or gave it up, at which time Salatielu should be named Tuitele. In 1912, Save died and Salatielu was named Tuitele.

At the beginning of the trial, the judge visited Leone and reported to the naval commander in a letter (November 24, 1902) that there was a dictatorship of Leoso over the others because Save, Atofau, and Maiava had given their right to the title to Leoso. The judge ignored this customary practice and added Leoso as a contestant in the court case. In the letter he noted that Save and Salatielu were more amenable to working with the naval administration. The naval commandant announced during the trial that a Leoso could not be Tuitele. Apparently the decision was made to break the authority of a powerful orator who might cause trouble for the newly-established administration.

Salatielu (born 1880) was Tuitele until he died in May 1932, setting in motion the next title case (National Archives, HC10-1933). Leoso again (the same man) made the claim that he is Matua and that he has the right to choose the Tuitele. When the American Chief Justice asked, “Why do Fiu, Maiava, and Leoso pick a Tuitele?” Leoso explained that the authority over the title rests with him: “I was the owner.” Leoso stated that he will never agree with the court that Fiu and Maiava also decide the title because “Fiu and Maiava are the legs of Leoso’s walking stick.” In support of Leoso, High Chief Atofau gave a statement to the court.

Atofau spelled out several distinctions that hold today. He claimed that the two high chiefs in the Tuitele family are Tuitele (ali’i) and Leoso (tulāfale). To support this, he reported that the complimentary address for Tuitele is, “Your Honor Tuitele and the different branches of the family,” and for Leoso, “Your Honor Leoso with the legs of your walking stick, Fiu and Maiava.” They have different domains of power: the kin alliance and the village/district alliances. If Tuitele wants a meeting of the family, Fiu and Maiava notify the family to attend. But Leoso calls a village or district meeting (a group of several families), and Fiu and Maiava notify another chief, Salevea, to organize it.

Atofau further clarified that Tuitele is known as *nofotuaiga*, a title of different branches. The name Tuitele has no land in the village of Leone. Rather, there are four branches and each branch has its own land where its ancestors are buried. “A Tuitele from Save family will live on Save land and Tuitele Save is buried on this land. Tuitele Palasi lived on Maiava lands and is buried there. Tuiteles from the Leoso family lived on Leoso lands and are buried there. The Toomata branch lives on Toomata land and is buried there” (National Archives, HC10-1933).

Atofau’s story is that in ancient times the Tuitele was appointed by Leoso only, but then Toomata came from Upolu with Maiava and Fiu and created the other branch. In most versions of this story, including one told in 2006, the Tuitele in Leone gambled away the title in a game of quoits in the nineteenth century and the title was taken by the winner to Upolu. Eventually, it was returned to Leone with the second group. At some point before the Americans, the branches shared the title but this was not recognized by the naval administration because that was against their policy. Nor was the Navy prepared to allow a high orator to name the titleholder.

In a Tuitele case in 1947 (National Archives, HC41-1947), with different men in the titles, the Leoso repeats the claim that he is Matua and the two Matuas, Leoso and Olo, will send a petition to the Court on behalf of “we, the heirs of Tuitele Sipa’i.” The petition is to remove the title Tuitele from the holder but in the court hearing Pastor Ameperosa of Leone requests to speak first: “Honorable Court, Chief Justice and Associate Judges, this refers to the parties in the case. As I am the Pastor in your village, I request both parties to settle your difficulties right now in court.”

As a result of this intervention, the two sides agreed to settle their differences. The pastor is not a titled chief and he does not sit in political councils but he does have high status through his relation to the sacred. The pastor can intervene in village politics, whereas the chiefs cannot intervene in church procedures (Tcherkézoff 1993:74). This

case is an example of how the valuation of sacred is higher than the authority of the chiefs (Tcherkézoff 1993:75).

There are no public records for the 1982 Tuitele decision, but the Leoso was named Tuitele, thus proving the previous Leoso's claim, 80 years earlier, that a Leoso could be Tuitele. In 2006 there was a discursive event that crossed social space-time about titles and alliances that have dominated Tuitele title decisions for a hundred years. And as the participants agreed, it is a difficult topic that needs more time in another political council to be fully resolved. The actors change but the structural ranking remains important enough to raise the issue in a public ceremony. The omnipresent structure is fixed by the *fa'alupega*, but American decisions interfered with the authority of orators. Court cases returned to the topic of titles and alliances repeatedly.

The flexibility of Samoan titles was never adequately understood by the American judges in the Land and Titles Court. The American judges referred constantly to blood relatedness and whether the candidates had a blood claim to the title. Blood relatedness was overemphasized by the American judges, although there was a tendency in Samoa for titles to pass from father to son, from elder brother to younger brother, or from a man to his sister's son. However, there were various paths to trace a claim, and it was possible that an adopted man could hold the name, or that someone could claim a title on the basis of service or other outstanding personal characteristics (Shore 1976). The Navy tried to narrow the possibilities to inherit a title through a focus on descent in an attempt to limit factionalism (Tiffany 1975). This focus changed the criteria for title decisions. There is evidence today, however, that Samoans want to change the way of deciding titles according to more traditional practices. Both possibilities mentioned by Keesing (1934) are coming together: the "scarcity value" creates long periods of vacant titles, which causes problems for the reproduction of *faamatai*, and in turn generates criticism of *faamatai* when it appears that it does not work as it should.

CONCLUSION

Despite changes over the last hundred years, *faamatai* is still being reproduced in certain practices, such as the installation ceremony. The proper names, as tokens, are mnemonic references that position political actors in Samoa. Understanding the context for what was said in the speech gives a temporal perspective on how the political structure unfolded. A *fono* gathering of chiefs is still the proper place for raising important social and political issues. Was the debate in 2006 a sign that the system of political and kinship alliances is changing? Perhaps it is business as usual, but the fact that high titles are unfilled for long periods creates strains. Tcherkézoff (2005) finds possible challenges to *faamatai* in independent Samoa in the debates about suffrage and in new religious movements that emphasize individualism. Research on Samoan migrant communities in Australia (Va'a 2001) and California (Gershon 2006) indicates that *faamatai* takes new forms outside of the Samoan islands. In migrant communities, the Samoan church pastors assume prominent leadership roles.

In American Samoa, another serious challenge to the reproduction of *faamatai* is the increased use of English. Many young people do not know the honorific language, the

pan-Samoan ranking of titles, and the appropriate speeches that are necessary to conduct a ceremony or a sophisticated debate in a fono. They do not have the oratory skills that are necessary for performing faamatai. These factors, as well as the political location of American Samoa, contribute to the vacancy of titles for long periods.

The principles of faamatai have provided a template for political action and the structure for a parallel political discourse during the last century. In much the same way as the islanders of Rapa, French Polynesia, have a land and kinship system with its own dynamic, imminent principles, so, too, are there possibilities for action in Samoa involving land, titles, and ranked kin alliances. As apparent in the referencing during the speech, when carefully balanced relationships are threatened, serious discussions about ranking are generated. In American Samoa, the system seems to revert to basic principles regarding rank when faced with political decisions about statehood or independence.

NOTES

1. The research for this project was conducted in 2006–07 and funded by the Academy of Finland (SA-118442).
2. On the matai system, I relied on Buck (1930), Duranti (1981, 1984, 1994), Freeman (1978/1940s), Gilson (1970), Gray (1960), Holmes (1980), Keesing (1934), F. and M. Keesing (1956), Krämer (1994/1902), Mead (1930), Meleiseā (1987, 1995), Schoeffel (1995), Shore (1982), Tcherkézoff (1993, 2000, 2005), Tuimaleali'ifano (2006), Va'a (2001), and Vaai (1999).
3. In American Samoan Tutuila, which was traditionally part of the Upolu district of Atua and had no maximal lineage of its own, I was told that the powerful orator group was called Matua, while in Manu'a it was the *To'oto'o*.
4. Similar processes happened with the orators in Western Samoa under the Germans, to the point that the Germans even re-wrote the fa'alupega (Meleiseā 1987:86–87).
5. The Tuimanu'a was called “king” when people spoke in English. The naval government abolished the title because there should be no royal titles in American democracy (Gray 1960; Keesing 1956).
6. In Western Samoa, the two orators in Falefā village were called Matua, and seemed to be the most powerful men. “At the time of my stay, the two holders of the Matua titles represented, in many respects, the leading forces in village politics, and by means of their rivalry they created a continuous stream of energy that shaped the social life of the community” (Duranti 1981:34). Shore (1982) has similar data and it was likely the case in Leone when these Matua titles were filled. In 1927, the Leoso was addressed as Matua and he was an influential orator across Tutuila (Cartwright n.d.).
7. Betty Herdrich translated from Samoan to English for me.

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