

The Reconfiguring Self

ONCE, WHILE I WAS TEACHING *Coming of Age in Samoa* at the community college in American Samoa, I argued against the placid emotions Mead ascribed to Samoans. "It is commonly said that when a man commits adultery, his wife and her sisters (or sometimes her husband's sisters) may pursue the girl and beat her and cut off an ear! Surely this is not evidence of even emotions," I averred. "Oh no," one of my older male students interjected, "it is not that the wife is jealous, but if she does not punish the girl, the girl will show off the affair, and it is a disgrace to the wife's family."

My student meant that the hypothetical wife's actions are rational rather than emotional, and based on family loyalty rather than on a personal passion. This explanation conveys much that is true about Samoans: they are highly identified with the groups they represent. It is not wholly plausible, however, that the wife's actions are impoverished of personal sentiments. Rather, the causal factors evoked in my student's explanation demonstrate the Samoan tendency to displace awareness of the subjective dimension of experience in favor of social relationships and of the roles people play within them.¹

While some Samoan wives putatively take revenge for the sake of family honor, Chief Tuiteleapaga tells us that in old Samoa others lauded their husbands' infidelities for the same reason.

When a village set out for a *malaga* (trip or visit . . .), it is the custom of the young men—married or unmarried—to elope with as many girls as possible in the villages visited. Their wives, who followed them, would laugh and congratulate their men for gallantry and popularity . . . well knowing it was just . . . a means to add prestige . . . to their families and village. . . . The elopements and the act itself were, and still are, called *ai o malaga* (scores of the . . . trip). [1980:63]

But Chief Tuiteleapaga, unlike my student, admits that

There were always cases of some young wife who was unable to contain her jealousy and went right to the family of the

vixen or vixens who had eloped with her husband and . . . made a speech within the hearing of family and other spectators. . . . "Hark ye, you villagers, I have a sow that I would like to be given to you to eat, provided you like the meat, because she is tough and skinny." [Or] "I have a horse that I am willing to lend to anyone who would like to ride." [Or] "I have a latrine with one big opening." [1980:63]

And so forth and so on.

Elisions and ambiguities in the identities of cultural subjects have an important place intuitively in current ethnography, but too often intuition is not matched with theoretical explanation. Through a Samoan illustration, I offer a theory that accounts for those contrapuntal tendencies in cultural selves that anthropologists and culture members like Chief Tuiteleapaga are wont to observe. This theory addresses a dilemma in contemporary anthropology: How do we find a path between extreme cultural relativism and essentialist perspectives on human nature as fixed by universal laws? How do we avoid fitting cultures into a Procrustean bed of commensurability and yet talk about what humans share?

The intent of this article is to contribute to pathfinding between extremes by delineating what I believe to be a recurrent systematicity in the shifting and often contradictory self-representations produced by anthropological subjects. It has been argued in contemporary anthropology that much of Western psychological theory is based upon a folk model of the self and, therefore, that it does not generalize.² Along with Kondo (1990:35–36) and Ewing (1990), I argue that the idea of the self as unitary is indeed a folk model; people trade in cultural representations of self not so much for unity as for facility in the use of these representations to negotiate actual situations. If Western theories about the self are marred by cultural bias, however, this does not mean that the project of seeking universal patterns in the construction of cultural selves is inherently dubious. While as ethnographers we honor the particularities of local knowledge, as social scientists we must seek patterns of more than local significance.

In what follows I take the term *self* to refer to the experience, in the phenomenological sense of the term, of

JEANNETTE MARIE MAGEO is Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Washington State University, Pullman, WA 99164-4910, and Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT.

being a person. There are two particularly general dimensions to this experience: social and subjective. The anthropological literature suggests, however, that in their understandings of selves, cultures tend to highlight either the experience of being an individual (subjectivity) or the experience of being a role player in a larger group (sociality), rather than weighing both equally.³ The former highlighting is often called egocentrism, the latter, sociocentrism. This highlighting constitutes a cultural premise about the self, namely that people are individuals or that they are role players. I call these premises ontological because they are, *au fond*, premises about what it means to *be* a person. We will see that ontological premises are deeply embedded in the cultural lexicons used to index personhood.

Inasmuch as ontological premises tend to be either sociocentrically or egocentrically weighed, sociocentrism and egocentrism are a matter of degree. In complex societies characterized by diverse subcultures, hybrids are also likely and have been documented.⁴ Wherever a given ontological premise falls on the sociocentric and egocentric continuum, whether hybridized or not, it is likely to be partial. Like all forms of representation, premises are inherently selective, privileging relevant features of experience above others; invalidating experiences are apt to be downplayed. Downplaying a dimension of human experience is productive of ambiguity: cultural premises about people cause them to appear in a certain light, and yet they retain a background that subtly confounds this appearance.

One can imagine this irritating, irremediable ambiguity is for a first moment unsaid in some hypothetical epiphany of a conceptual system, but I hope to show that the unsaid becomes not only the topic but the obsession of the system that at first neglects it. If social experience is initially relegated to the status of an epiphenomenon, it comes to be featured in later discursive practices. If subjective experience is understood to be the epiphenomenon, it comes to be featured. This explains why a culture like Bali might appear to observers to emphasize social experience, as in Mead's or Geertz's portraits (Mead and Bateson 1942; Geertz 1973), and yet feature practices and beliefs that are clearly preoccupied with the inner life of the subject, as in Wikan's portrait (1987). Culture members are more preoccupied by the ambiguities inherent in their society's premises about the self than we, as anthropologists, usually credit them with being. This preoccupation is, I believe, productive of a series of discursive attempts to hegemonically encompass stray experiences of self within a descriptive system.⁵

This series consists of three types of discourse: moral, compartmental, and strategic. Moral discourses are those that people employ to evaluate and adjudicate one another's behavior, such as gossiping and sermonizing. Compartmental discourses are those associated with

formal or ceremonial relationships on the one hand and with informality, camaraderie, play, and popular entertainment on the other. Strategic discourses are those that evince a crafted blending of other discourse types and are evident in the complex approaches people take to the messy flow of ongoing events and relationships. We will see that this series has a sequential logic: moral discourse implicitly comments upon the initial premise, while compartmental and strategic discourses comment on the preceding discourse type.

In any actual cultural instance, however, all these discursive practices may be simultaneously present and incipient in one another. In this sense, my theory is one of interrelated levels found within the heteroglossic character of people's talk. *Heteroglossia* is a term that suggests when one studies the talk of a literary character one is apt to find several dissonant voices (Bakhtin 1981). The same can be said of the subjects of anthropological research and, for that matter, of ourselves.⁶ While strategic discourse involves a purposeful blending of preceding discourse types, disparate discourses about the person—uncombined, contradictory, and often in incipient conflict with one another—are evident in all of us as we shift from one definition of a situation to another, casting about for a workable approach to our experience.⁷

These categories (ontological, moral, compartmental, and strategic) are obviously my own, yet they are recognizable both to anthropologists and to cultural subjects. Generally people recognize that their culture has a concept of what it means to be a person, although they often essentialize this concept, taking it to be the same as human nature. People also recognize that some talk is moral, that some forms of talk tend to be used when one means to be polite and others when informality is appropriate, and that at times people play upon discursive conventions to further an aim, be that aim their own advantage and that of affiliated others, or an aim more idealistic in character.

Let me preface a fuller presentation of this theory with a few disclaimers. I refer to cultures as sociocentric or egocentric as one might refer to hair color as fair or dark, knowing that in any particular case shading is infinitely variable. On the basis of one data set my claims for the applicability of this theory must be modest. I hope to provide a plausible account of the self in Samoa and to suggest certain larger relationships. Proof as to whether this theory generalizes must be left to others. I do not dismiss the possibility that in some societies, or during some historical periods, there may be competing systems of self.

The discursive series I discuss does not allude to cultural "stages" of development; the entire sequence could, no doubt, be found at any given time in Samoan culture history. Nonetheless it would be wrong to conclude that premises about the self and associated discursive

sive practices in any society, Samoa included, are historically consistent. How historical change has affected Samoan self-understandings is, however, a subject I must relegate to future work. I also defer questions of how systems of self are reproduced in cultural subjects; here a discussion of stages will be relevant. Questions such as how individuals represent themselves to themselves will not be considered.⁸

My data on Samoan selves were collected during my eight-year residence in Samoa from 1981 to 1989 and on return trips during the summers of 1990 and 1991. The self is far from a new topic in Samoa, and therefore I also draw on other ethnographies, most notably those of Bradd Shore and Eleanor Gerber. My own data were collected during several different research projects that were the basis of prior articles addressing more particular ideas about the Samoan self. I will, therefore, also draw upon my prior work to paint what I now believe to be a more complete portrait.

Ontological Premises

Ontological premises about the self are simply cultural versions of what it means to be a person. People see "being" as that which is constitutive or, to use the Western phrase, that which is the nature of people—not in the Hobbesian sense of what is violent and untamed but in the sense of definitive attributes, qualities, or functions. Ontological premises, therefore, are accessible in those terms used to refer to human nature or to the character of persons and even of things, for our conception of "the nature of being" probably begins with ourselves but extends to the entire phenomenal world. In Samoa, nature or character is denoted by the term *aga*, which is most typically glossed as "behavior," but it is behavior that denotes the nature of the being or thing in question.

In 1987 when hurricane Tusi virtually demolished the island of Manu'a, one of my consultants remarked philosophically, "That's the *aga* of the wind!" I stood there looking uncomprehending. Fluent in English, she glossed her remark for me as, "That's the wind's nature" and then again as, "That's the wind's character." Freeman provides numerous examples of the use of *aga* to refer to the nature of all sorts of beings and things: persons certainly, but also cows, boats, the sea, the wind, and so forth (1984:249–251). He tells us, for example, that *aga a le 'apogaleveleve* refers to the nature of the spider "including . . . its innate ability to make a web, and to trap and devour its prey" (1984:249). In the phrase *aga a le ma'a*, "the reference is to the natural properties of the stone in question as when . . . it is worked to make an implement" (1984:250). Yet when used in reference to persons the term is unlike the Euro-American conception of people's nature or character, for in Samoa people have not one but several *aga*.

When one uses the term to tell a youngster, "Behave nicely!" (*Fai'alelei au aga!*), one uses the plural form. Here the plural is indicated through the prefacing pronoun *au*, which indicates that more than one thing belongs to the subject of the sentence; *lau* would indicate that one thing belonged to the subject.

The curious multiplicity of character in Samoan is perhaps more understandable in light of a better definition of *aga*, which denotes social "faces" in the sense of social roles and styles of behavior. It is very like our term *persona*, which derives from the Latin term for mask or face but which also signifies social roles.⁹ In Samoa, when an older relative sees a girl from his family wearing lipstick, he might say, "Whose *aga* is that?" which means both "Where did you pick up that painted face?" and "Where did you pick up that style of behaving, down on the docks?" The older relative might answer his own question; if a notorious lady of the night called Mutu is currently the talk of the town, he would say, "Look at Mutu's *aga*." In this manner he alludes to the role Samoans associate with painted faces. *Aga*, then, are affected: they are put on, as one might put on lipstick or a seductive manner. When I asked an American Samoan college student about the relation between *aga* and imitation, his response was, "Isn't that what *aga* is?"

We think of character as inner, but Samoans use the term *aga* for character because their ontological premise is that persons are social role players.¹⁰ Samoans do not lack a word for behavior that comes from within the person: the term is *āmio*.¹¹ They even see this inner behavior as unitary rather than as multiple: one can also say, "Behave nicely!" using the term *āmio*, but in the singular form (*Fai'alelei lau āmio!*).¹² Yet Samoans do not see this inner-originating behavior as tantamount to nature: *āmio* has moral rather than ontological connotations (Freeman 1984:250; Love 1983). While *aga* may have moral connotations, it also may not: the *aga* of the wind is to blow, in itself being neither good nor bad.

Because this ontological premise highlights sociality, the alternative experience (subjectivity) tends to be downplayed in descriptions of behavior, as we saw in Samoan reports about the rationality of betrayed wives. This devaluation of personal feelings is proverbial in Samoa. Explicating an old proverb, Schultz tells us "in the estimates of Samoans the death of the wife or a little child" is counted as a loss 'easy to bear and easy to repair,' whereas "the death of the head of the family . . . is considered a great loss" (1985:10). The criterion here is the public position of the deceased and presupposes the relative unimportance of the personal dimension of experience. Like reports on wives, this proverb indexes a premise about persons, which often does not accord with behavior. When one visits Lyndon Baines Johnson hospital in American Samoa one often sees anxious fathers on a bench outside the emergency room with blankets gently

wrapped around children who are perched in their laps. Although parents believe they should be formal and distant with children, when a child falls sick Samoans become the most solicitous of parents.

Whatever dimension of experience is elided in the ontological premise remains lexically undifferentiated: there are few terms with which one can make subtle, or even not so subtle, discriminations about kinds and qualities of this experience. Further, the terms that do exist have certain recurrent properties.

First, such terms are highly general. In Samoa, inner experience is elided in the ontological premise and all inner experience is referred to by the summary term *loto*. When used as a verb, *loto* means “to will”; when used as a noun, it means “the will.” However, *loto* refers not only to volition but also to private thoughts and feelings (Mageo 1989:191–194).¹³ Many modern Samoan love songs employ the word *loto*, probably because love is a condition of the interior self, yet the vagueness and generality of the term is often evident, as in the love song below.

Wriggle, Wriggle, Wriggle, Wriggle like an ant. If dancing wriggle like an ant. Rich as dipping in coconut cream, Sweet, sweet like banana poi.	<i>Migoï, Migoï, Migoï, Migoï pei se loi. 'A sivasiva 'ua gāoioi.¹⁴ Lololo pei se pe'epe'e 'ua loloi, Suiti, suamalie pei 'o se poi.</i>
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My pigeon, pigeon e Is crying, crying alas! <i>This is my loto,</i> May it be like this, May there be making dear.	<i>Lā tā lupe, lupe ē 'Ua tagi, tagi auē! 'O lo'u loto lea, Tau 'ina fa'a'apea, Tau 'ina fa'a'apelepele.¹⁵</i>
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Wriggle, Wriggle e, Wriggle, Wriggle e, Wriggle, wriggle e, Wriggle, wriggle more. Wriggle here my dear.	<i>Migoï, Migoï e, Migoï, Migoï e, Migoï, migoï e, Migoï, migoï tele. Migoï mai la'u pele.</i>
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The Samoan who wrote this song for me was one of my first language teachers. He rendered the line “This is my loto” as “Here is what I think.” But when I asked several other Samoans proficient in English to gloss the line, some translated it as “This is what I feel”; yet others translated it as “This is my will.” When shown the variant translations, all consultants told me those too were correct. *Loto* is the Samoan word for thinking, feeling, and willing because these are all aspects of inner experience, and, while we make subtle discriminations about this experience—qualifying it and elaborating multiple categories for it—Samoans do not.¹⁶

Second, key terms for the neglected type of experience tend to have antisocial connotations. Samoans think of the *loto* as an organ located in the chest. There is no

equivalent organ in English; therefore, Samoans sometimes gloss the word as “heart.” The literal term for heart is *fatu*. Like our English word for heart—but unlike *loto*—*fatu* is associated in contemporary Samoa with romance.¹⁷ There was a Samoan crooner named Mr. Fatu who toured American Samoa in the 1980s. “Mr. Fatu” is an apt stage name, while “Mr. Loto” is an unromantic thought: “Mr. Willful” or “Mr. Stubborn” would be the meaning.¹⁸ In Samoan the prefix *fai* means “to make.” When one adds *fai* to *loto* (*failoto*), one gets a word meaning “stubborn” that indicates what we would call an “attitude.” Should a child complain about a parental order, for example, the parent will often say, “Don’t failoto to me.”

Third, key terms for the neglected experience, and their derivatives, tend to have connotations or denotations of passion. *Lotoa*, a word based on the root *loto*, is the Samoan gloss for “passion”; *lotōa* is the gloss for “passionate.” Should a girl run off with a boy and then be brought home, and then run off again, Samoan parents may be counseled to let her go because she longs for the boy in her *loto*; in this circumstance there is little they can do. If the aspect of experience that is left out of the ontological premise is associated with passion, then one might say that it becomes a cultural symbol for nature—not in the sense of constitutive being, but in the Hobbesian sense of that which is intrinsically wild and incorrigible.

At this point my reader may wonder if ontological premises seem to be what people see as fundamental to the self; but if what is excluded from the ontological premise is also seen as intrinsic, then this excluded aspect of experience too is fundamental. This is precisely my point: there is a worm at the heart of cultural conceptions of being; exclusion of certain experiences of self in the ontological premise entails an awareness, however dim, that this premise is descriptively inadequate.

Moral Discourse

To compensate for the descriptive shortcomings of the ontological premise, moral discourse converts it to a set of ethical prescriptions. On one level this conversion is philosophical and linguistic: it is a matter of telling people they should behave in a certain manner, rather than merely positing that they do. In Samoa the ontological premise is that people are role players. In Samoan moral discourse this premise becomes a prescription: one should play one’s assigned role in the group.¹⁹

Samoans say “Stand at your post” (*Tū i lou tulaga*). Here “post” refers to one’s status and rank, and “standing at one’s post” refers to acting in accordance with one’s status and rank. To do so is to treat all with appropriate respect (*fa’aaloalo*), which is the very signature of the “Samoan way of life” (*fa’aSāmoa*). Counsels come from

those above in the Samoan age-grade hierarchy and are aimed at those below, never the reverse.²⁰ Yet, this one dictum is so basic a guide for conduct it can be made even to someone older.

The problem with converting an ontological premise into a moral prescription is that the excluded dimension of the self inspires tendencies that gainsay this prescription. One of Shore's consultants tell us, "If there were no laws this village would be no good because each person would live according to his own thoughts. If I wanted to be a big shot [*fia sili*] I'd go ahead and do it; if I wanted to take charge of everything [*fia pule*] then I'd do that" (1982:157).

The beliefs about human moral nature implicit in this statement can be glossed as follows: all suffer compulsions (normally held in check by social norms) to live according to their private thoughts (*loto*), and private desires (*loto*); these compulsions inevitably result in tendencies toward dominance-seeking. One might add that these dominance-seeking tendencies evince a turbulent inner life, one that is unrecognized in the maxim that persons are the roles they play.

Because of the intrinsic antipathy between moral discourse and neglected experiences, these experiences become a focus of social anxiety. This does not mean that culture members begin making subtle discriminations about discredited experiences of self. Rather, they attempt to position the problematical experiences in ethical categories within the framework of social orderings.

While in Samoa there is a poverty of terms to characterize the varieties of inner experience, the language abounds with terms that class the inner disposition of the subject—also referred to as *loto*—as reprehensible or laudable. Dispositions may be jolly (*lotofiafia*), or envious (*lotoleaga*), or obstinate (*lotoma'a'a*), or proud (*lotomitamita*), or callous (*lotomomotu*), and so forth. So extensive is the terminology for moral and immoral dispositions that Samoan-English dictionaries do not try to enumerate them all, giving only common examples of such constructions. If the inner self is a largely undiscovered background to the Samoan ontological premise, in moral discourse the *loto* is seen as accounting for much of human behavior.

While terms for the neglected dimension of the self multiply in moral discourse, the connotations of these terms suggest that this dimension is good when quiescent and bad when it actively emerges in behavior. In other words, while moral discourse constitutes an admission that the dimension of self backgrounded in the ontological premise has a significant place in the description of behavior, it also counsels that this dimension should be suppressed. In Samoa, dispositions that reflect the unregulated expression of the *loto* are identified with moral weakness. *Lotovaivai* (weak *loto*), for example, signifies a person who indulges in personal sentiment, and is a

pejorative term; *lototele* (strong *loto*) signifies a person who bravely constrains personal sentiment, and is a complimentary term (Mageo 1991a:408–410).

Ironically, the moral effort to make recalcitrant experience conform to the ontological premise seems to further encourage the bifurcation of cultural understandings of the self. Mead was correct that Samoans regard people as integral elements of (or as representatives of) a cooperative group (1961[1928], 1937). To respectfully cooperate with superiors is praised as *lotofa'amaualalo* (make one's *loto* low) and indicates that one's own thoughts, as Shore's informant put it, are held in check. Samoan children, however, do not spontaneously make their *loto* low but must be forced to do so through frequent punishments (Freeman 1983:200–211). These punishments produce temporary compliance, but also nourish tendencies toward willfulness that undermine cooperativeness and are interpreted as dominance-seeking (Mageo 1988:44–57, 1991a:410–412, 1991b:17–28). In childhood these tendencies are condemned as cheekiness, and later as arrogance (*lotofa'amaualuga*, literally "to make one's *loto* high").

Ontological premises are evident in the cultural lexicon used to index the "beingness" of persons but imply no special discourse about the self. Moral discourse is a classifying kind of talk in which behavior is classed as virtuous or wicked, or as some shade of gray between the poles. Through this classificatory activity comes a recognition that censured behaviors are likely to be as widespread as admired behaviors. Through moral discourses people discover the universal tendency to act along the lines this discourse proscribes. In Samoan discourse, respectful traits of character are lauded; dominance-seeking traits are censured. Yet moral conversations in Samoa, from sermonizing to gossiping, are peppered with references to people who fail to show respect and instead seek dominance (Wendt 1979; Schoeffel 1979:141–142).

Compartmental Discourses

To compensate for the prescriptive shortcomings of moral discourse, compartmental discourse recasts the behaviors that moral discourse lauds and condemns as different genres of social performances. Because of the performative character of compartmental discourses, meanings may be dramatized in either a verbal or a gestural language. Behaviors prescribed in moral discourse are cast as a type of performance undertaken by all within the limited parameters of formal contexts. Behaviors proscribed in moral discourse are also cast as performative; however, this type of performance is undertaken in an ironic mode and only within informal contexts.

Because the compartmental division of social life into formal and informal contexts is oversimplified and does not reflect the real variety of social contexts, it is an

“as if” sort of division. In formal discourse one speaks and acts as if there were distance or difference between participants; in informal discourse one speaks and acts as if there were closeness or identity. In egocentric societies people tend to be viewed as separate individuals who may be more or less intimate with one another; therefore, compartmental discourses emphasize the significance of distance/closeness. In sociocentric societies people are role players whose roles may be more or less similar to one another; therefore, compartmental discourses emphasize the significance of difference/identity.

Because Samoans are sociocentric and preoccupied with status, for purposes of discourse they attempt to assess whether the situation is one in which one should act as if there is a status difference in participants’ roles or one in which one should act as if there is no status difference; they use formal discourse in the first instance and informal discourse in the second.²¹ In Samoan moral discourse, respectful behaviors are lauded; dominance-seeking behaviors are censured. Therefore, formal discourse is a dramatic version of respect, and informal discourse a dramatic (and ironic) version of dominance-seeking.

To Samoans, respect implies an acknowledgment of another’s status. In formal discourse, therefore, they attribute high status to others, which signifies respect. The 19th-century missionary George Turner remarks:

If you listen to the talk of little boys even, you will hear them addressing each other as *chief* this, that, and the other thing. Hence, I have heard a stranger remark, that the difficulty in Samoa is, not to find who is a chief, but to find out who is a common man. [1984(1884):174; emphasis in original]

One also acknowledges the other’s status less directly in symbolic performances, in which one cloaks the personal dimensions of the self by withholding personal sentiments and by hesitating to contradict others or refuse their requests. In a letter to the editor of the *Samoa News*, for example, one Samoan (Salu Reed) says, “*Fa’aaloalo* [respect] . . . means to hold your tongue, even when the directions given you by your elders are wrong” (May 4, 1989). Young Samoan women cannot politely decline if asked to dance.

The supreme example of Samoan formal discourse is the ceremonial speech (*lāuga*), in which Samoans acknowledge the status of the participants through esoteric allusions that compare present circumstances and persons to the great events and people of ancient days. The orator of a typical convocation speech says, “As the girl dances with her necklace of nuts, the rustle of banners and general din is heard, as it is said of Tigilau” (Matā’afa Tu’i 1987:31, 34). A Samoan interpreter of these allusions tells us that the girl is Sina, a beauty whom one is continually running into in Samoan folklore. The banners refer to a legend about Salevao, a spirit who was disconsolate as

a result of his adoption as a child.²² Salevao was cheered by his adopted parents with a great dance at which there were many banners and much festive commotion. Tigilau is Sina’s legendary paramour; however, here the reference is actually to a tale about his courtship of the lady Lau (Matā’afa Tu’i 1987:38). By innuendo these allusions convey that the current meeting is a significant one, flattering to the dignity of all who attend.

To Samoans, dominance-seeking implies challenging another’s status. While they assert status through a dignified demeanor, in informal discourse they present ludic challenges to the status of others by impugning their dignity in jest. Children, for example, when they are not calling one another “chief,” may refer to one another by embarrassing names like “Legs with Sores” (*Vae Popo’u*), “Thick Lips” (*Gutu Felea*), “Splash Bowels” (*Taepisi*), and so forth, depending on the other’s personal characteristics. One also impugns the other’s status less directly in symbolic performances.

Because cloaking the personal self shows respect, exhibiting personal things—particularly in the sexual and scatological sense—shows disrespect.²³ A Samoan tells me, for example, how the women of an extended family might respond to a man who acted in an insulting manner toward one of them: “Our women . . . band together and walk in front of someone’s house [of the man’s family] and raise up their lavalava . . . and they swear.” In informal discourse these same gestures are placed in the frame “play” and, as Bateson says, this frame signifies that the indicated behavior does not mean what it appears to mean (Bateson 1972:177–193). The obscene night dances of ancient Samoa, for example, were called *pōula*—literally “night joking”—and involved an escalating competitive exchange of dance numbers between groups in which each group playfully besmirched the other’s dignity through verbal and choreographic exhibitionism (Williams 1984[1830–32]:247–248; Kraemer 1978[1902], 2:389–398; Mageo 1992:446–447, 1994). More literally *pōula* means “nighttime *ula*.” *Ula* is indirect not only in that it challenges the status of others through the trope of self-exposure; in *ula* one appears to be denigrating one’s own dignity, but in this guise playfully assaults that of others, such as in the example below.

One elderly and dignified *tama’ita’i* [lady] is celebrated among the women of her village for a particular dance she does, completely silent and straight faced using eye movements to express passion, resignation, pain, strain, surprise, and release, she parodies a whole sequence of events in sexual intercourse, enacting both the husband and wife roles. [Schoeffel 1979:217]

While the lady’s performance appears to impugn her own dignity (one would never suggest that a *tama’ita’i* was sexually active), it effects a loss of dignity in the audience,

who may lose all self-control, laughing until tears stream down their faces.

In Samoa, informal discourse recasts dominance-seeking not only as ludic, but also as “forwarding the status of one’s group” rather than as expressive of a personalistic desire. A Western Samoan high chief, currently in his sixties, remembers a *pōula* from his youth. The evening consisted of an exchange of increasingly uninhibited performances between a women’s group on one side of the room and a men’s group on the other. As the dance became increasingly exciting, a male would shout, pick up a woman and carry her outside. If the couple did not soon return the male group shouted, “One wife for our side!”

Beyond Binarism

Compartmental discourses involve binary categorizations of situations as formal or informal. These compartmental categorizations derive from sociostructural features of identity, although they take these features as symbolic. In Samoa sociostructural categories are based upon status, rank, sex, and age (Shore 1977, 1982). In formal discourse one behaves as if participants are different in terms of these variables; in informal discourse one behaves as if participants are similar in terms of these variables. Samoan ceremonies between groups are ideal instances of formal discourse, and Samoan entertainment exchanges are paradigmatic instances of informal discourse. Yet, by virtue of a contradiction between the discursive content of these events and their sociostructural form, both Samoan ceremonies and entertainments play upon sociostructural categories to negate them, and with them, prevailing social boundaries.²⁴

In Samoan ceremonies, each side typically is represented by a titled male; courtesy dictates their titles be treated as approximate. In terms of structural categories, therefore, intergroup ceremonies are peer contexts, that is, interchanges between persons of the same social category (males) and the same social rank (titles of approximate rank). Structurally speaking, then, ceremonies should constitute informal contexts. In Samoan peer contexts, rivalry is likely (Shore 1977, 1982). Indeed, rivalry between titles and groups is endemic in Samoa and ceremonies often bring together representatives of those groups that would normally compete. The content of these events, however, is an exchange of respect between the sides. Each group flatters the other, acting as if it were the status inferior to the other (Churchward 1887:99–101; Wilkes 1845:149).

Here the discursive message, conveyed by an exchange of respect, is to be read as encompassing the sociostructural message about rivalry. Perhaps this gesture—the transcendence of rivalry through formal dis-

course—is ritual in nature, symbolically obviating the wrangling that characterizes relations between Samoan groups. This symbolism might explain why in successful Samoan ceremonies a radiant spirit of *communitas* infects participants. A missionary recollects these exchanges as characterized by “a delightful flow of friendship all over the place” and says, “On such occasions parties who have been living at variance had a fine opportunity of showing kindness to each other” (Turner 1984[1884]:183).

Perhaps the best example of Samoan entertainment exchanges is the pre-Christian night dance (*pōula*), organized as exchanges between two opposing villages in which the group representing the hosting village was usually female and the group representing the visiting village was usually male, although the opposite might also be the case. Relations between the sexes are respectful in Samoa and probably based upon the prototype of the brother-sister relationship (Shore 1977, 1982; Schoeffel 1979). In terms of sociostructural categories, therefore, these dances were respect contexts; however, *pōula* discourse was informal, consisting in an exhibitionistic mock rivalry between two sides.²⁵ Through bawdy presentations, groups took turns behaving as if they were peers engaged in a jocular contest with one another.

This contradiction constituted an ironic frame of reference, in which the discursive message and the sociostructural message negated one another. The ironic frame conveyed that participants were not really brothers and sisters, and, therefore, the sexualized exchange between them was not incestuous. This frame further suggested that the rivalry between those participating villages, represented by the female and male groups respectively, was facetious. Perhaps this gesture—the negation of rivalry through *ula*—was also ritualistic, symbolically dismantling the rivalry that characterizes relations between Samoan villages in a larger sense. This symbolism might explain the *communitas* that infects entertainments in Samoa even today.

Moral discourse predicates a set of abstract rules for behavior, while compartmental discourses involve a set of protocols or situational rules. In Samoa, for example, one should always stand at one’s post, but one should engage in respectful behavior in some situations and in jocular exhibitionism in others. Compartmental discourses, however, also involve transformational rules: messages are transformed and conveyed indirectly through an established set of tropes, such as the reluctance to say no in formal Samoan discourse, or the exposure of things private in informal Samoan discourse. In this sense compartmental discourses are language games. By language game I simply mean language activities in which communication is achieved indirectly, through a transformational set of rules.

As language games, compartmental discourses suggest a sense of gamesmanship. One can execute the trans-

formations through which this type of discourse is conveyed more or less deftly. The gamesmanship implicit in compartmental discourses gradually becomes explicit, so that in their most definitive forms, compartmental discourses come to play upon and invert those structural categories that represent their initial presuppositions, as do ceremonies and *pōula* in Samoa. We will soon see that strategic discourse expands upon the existence of language games to constitute itself as a species of gamesmanship.

Strategic Discourse

By taking material formerly defined as “bad” and calling it “good” under certain circumstances, compartmental discourses suggest there is nothing inherently wrong with that part of the self left out of the ontological premise and censured in moral discourse. This moral relativity precipitates the evolution of a third type of discourse in which the excluded element of self finds a normative place. I call this type “strategic” because those who exemplify it deploy all preceding discourses strategically, combining them to adapt to the anomalous character of lived experience.

In Samoa inner experience is ignored in the ontological premise and is conflated with individual will. Willfulness is later interpreted as a desire for dominance by moral discourse, a desire framed as ironic in informal discourse. In strategic discourse, dominance-seeking Samoan style escapes this ironic frame and becomes efficacious. The best historical exemplar of strategic discourse in Samoa is the ceremonial orator.

Originally Samoan extended families (*āiga*) were ruled by their *ali'i*, who were hereditary chiefs (Kirch 1984). During the course of Samoan prehistory, however, a new and distinctly Samoan type of chief began to appear, the “talking chief” (*tulāfale*) (see Figure 1). Possibly these chiefs were originally “retainer-warriors” (*toa*), who served hereditary chiefs (Holmes 1969; Shore 1977:434–435n). However, they soon became more closely associated with services of a verbal nature, speaking for the hereditary chiefs in the making of treaties, in negotiations between districts, and in ceremony.²⁶ Services in war and discourse were more closely connected than one might imagine. In principle, the ranking of titles was fixed in Samoa; in fact Samoan history can be looked upon as a violent dispute about titles, in which claims to titles were based upon lineage (Henry 1980; Meleisea 1987a). Warring and a subtle oratorical reconstruction of genealogies went hand-in-hand in justifying both the relative weighting of titles and the acquisition of the highest titles by a particular village and individual.

In ceremonial speeches, for example, each group’s orator honored the other group by reciting their village

titles (*fa’alupega*). These titles derived from and indexed the genealogical-historical tales that constituted the identities of village families. The recitation of these titles memorialized the status of families and validated the veracity and import of the tales; it was a formal and erudite method by which each group, through its orator, generously acknowledged the other group’s status by giving them, figuratively speaking, their titles. Orators, however, would also recount their own group’s genealogy, and when they did they were apt to subtly elevate their group’s status. Like a good lawyer, the ceremonial orator could be said to have used precedent for his own purposes. The Keesings say, “Deliberate manipulation by orators . . . of information to the advantage of their chiefs . . . approaches the character of being a norm” (1973[1956]:41, 102; see also Holmes 1974:27). As one of Shore’s consultants puts it, “If a *tulāfale* isn’t crooked, he isn’t a good orator” (Shore 1977:437). Almost by definition oratorical discourse is not what it appears and could be said to take the indirectness of compartmental discourses to a new level. While compartmental discourse entails an appreciation of the difference between explicit and implicit meanings (evident in the reliance upon tropes), strategic discourse presupposes a distinction between signification and intent.

In Samoan informal discourse, dominance-seeking is mitigated by redefining willfulness as “competitiveness in the service of the group”; likewise the orator’s discourse served the interests of a group, specifically the interests of the group’s high chief. The effects of this discourse, however, belied its subservient form: as a class, orators went from being servants who spoke for high chiefs to authorities who spoke to them. Keesing tells us that “the talking-men . . . passed from managing the chief’s affairs to managing the chief himself, determining his successors, deciding his marital affiliations, hedging him about with ceremonial restrictions.”²⁷ Even when they deprived high chiefs of power, however, they did it in a manner that appeared to be giving status and power. Certain *tulāfale* groups, for example, acquired the right to confer the highest chiefly titles.²⁸ By conferring these titles, orators appeared to bestow status and power on high chiefs and yet, inasmuch as these titles had come to be their gift, they had sequestered both dignity and power.

In contemporary Samoa the wars through which rival parties once adjudicated the relative ranking of titles can no longer be effectively carried out; therefore, adjudication has been transferred to the court.²⁹ In court, claims to titles and to the use of the family lands associated with titles are litigated in a strategic discourse. Land disputes are often won through the telling of plausible genealogical tales. In the Land and Titles Court of American Samoa, for example, litigants may contend that the other party’s ancestors sought haven with their own ancestors and were permitted to reside with and serve them; by implication



Figure 1

Two Samoan orators, also known as "talking chiefs." Left, Chief Mulituaopele Tamotu; right, Chief Olo Letuli. Photograph courtesy of Geoffrey VanKirk.

the other party's title is subservient to their own.³⁰ This argument long predates formal hearings in Samoa, so much so that the first judge to serve on the Land and Titles Court in Western Samoa and the earliest expert on Samoan jurisprudence, Dr. E. Schultz, cites it as an indigenous precedent (n.d.[1911]:1).

Judgments in title cases are often decided on the basis of the claimants' "forcefulness, character, personality and knowledge of Samoan customs" (American Samoa Report 1978:116).³¹ Forcefulness, character, personality, and knowledge of Samoan customs are demonstrated by giving testimony (American Samoa Report 1978:695–698). Frequently testimony is judged, like formal oratory, on the basis of the claimant's knowledge of the history and genealogy of the extended family and sometimes of the village *fa'alupega* associated with the title that is sought. In one precedential dispute about the high chief title of Mauga in Pago Pago, the winning claimant was preferred by the court at least in part because of his superior knowledge of the family genealogy and village titles (American Samoa Report 1978:650). Here a display of one's ability to give respect—by giving titles where titles are due—becomes a means to individual power and position.

One not only finds the indirect discourse historically associated with the figure of the ceremonial orator in court but also in the meetings of the village's governing body (*fono*), attended by village chiefs of whatever variety (Keesing and Keesing 1973[1956]:144; Duranti 1983). The purpose of this body is to adjudicate and administer village affairs. Village meetings begin with a ceremonial speech called a *lāuga*.³² The opening recitation of a ceremonial speech suggests that village meetings, like ceremonies, are respect contexts. This overture, however, is as misleading as oratory itself, for what is used in ceremonies to flatter the dignity of participants—iterations of tradition and the "the Samoan way"—is put to work in a village meeting for a competitive purpose, to win a dispute. To this end, *fono* speakers are apt to deploy any logically prior mode of talk—such as moralizing or poetical flattery or joking—strategically, as it serves political aims. In the 19th century, for example, joking was used by representatives of lower-status families to get higher-status participants to attend to their orations (Stair 1897:187–188).

While compartmental discourses represent an attempt to suit talk to situation, and thus constitute an

attention to actual experience lacking both in the ontological premise and in moral discourse, they still do violence to experience through what is often an arbitrary division. The distinctions compartmental discourses draw between contexts are too simple; situations are complex and not readily categorized in binary terms. Strategic discourse remedies this problem by enlisting discourses promiscuously to adapt to the shifting and varied contexts of real interactions and to play effectively at social intercourse. While the most definitive versions of compartmental discourses play upon sociostructural categories, the most definitive versions of strategic discourse play upon logically prior discourses. Thus, unlike compartmental discourses, strategic discourse has no “rules” per se, but is a creative enterprise and evinces what Bourdieu calls a “feel for the game” (1977).

The Samoan ontological premise about the self is that persons are social actors within a communalistic but hierarchical group. Moral discourse, therefore, supports respectfully playing the role appropriate to one’s assigned rank and encourages people to abjure those personal ambitions likely to interfere with playing this part. In view of the fact that personal ambitions may compel people to aspire above assigned rank, however, Samoans engage in a compartmental discourse in which there are two scripted parts: roles where one plays out one’s respect for the social other and roles in which one playfully challenges the rank of the other. In strategic discourse, Samoans move from the stance of role players to that of playwrights by combining a repertoire of roles and associated discourses in order to politick. By flattering the dignity of all, they actively shape the course of social life, covertly forwarding their own prestige and power and that of their affiliates.

Moral, contextual, and strategic discourses are in a sense metadiscourses: each constitutes a commentary upon the inadequacies of its predecessor in the premise-discourse series. Moral discourse reflects upon the descriptive incompleteness of the ontological premise, and thus represents an implicit acknowledgment that a dimension of experience is left out of this premise. Compartmental discourses reflect upon the prescriptive inadequacy of moral discourse in that they represent an implicit acknowledgment that people cannot expunge the censured dimension of the self from their behavior. Strategic discourse reflects upon the practical shortcomings of compartmental discourses in that it represents an implicit acknowledgment that these discourses do not provide sufficient guidelines to negotiate actual situations. This last recognition, however, goes beyond those accompanying previous discourse types: it is a recognition of the inherent difference between premises and discourses *about* experience and lived experience.³³

Conclusion

The three discursive practices described here are not part of a unified cultural model of the self. They are evidence of the lack of such a model, although they could also be looked upon as failed attempts to create a unified model, in which failure is productive of a complex cultural view of self. There is, nonetheless, a dialogic cohesiveness to the premise-discourse series, but it is the cohesiveness, or perhaps one should say the cogency, of a conversation that begins with a statement and proceeds with a series of *yes buts*. Each new discourse follows on the ontological premise and the preceding discourse, however divergent the position it articulates. The further one goes into this cultural conversation, the closer one comes to an understanding of human experience that is universally recognizable. American entrepreneurs, for example, would have no trouble recognizing the talking chief, although they are likely to find tales of Samoan wives who do violence to a mistress merely because it is the rational thing to do, or who laud a husband’s infidelities for the same reason, or about parents who see the loss of a child as “easy to bear and easy to repair,” as exotic, if they credit them at all.

To return to the concerns with which this essay opened, the theory of the self in culture presented here represents a path between cultural relativism and essentialism. Essentialism presupposes that fundamental characteristics are possessed by human beings—that there is a human nature existing apart from the discourses through which humans constitute that nature (Bocock 1986:112–117). Inasmuch as sociocentrism and egocentrism are the ends of a scale, ontological premises about the self vary between cultures. The discursive practices that follow from an initial premise will also vary, but I suggest that the dynamics reflected in the relations between an initial premise and subsequent discourses are cross-culturally recurrent. If this theory suggests universally shared patterns, however, it portrays the self as a site for the play of discourses and as constituted in and through recognizable types of discursive practice.

Summarizing Foucault, White says “in any given effort to capture the order of things in language, we condemn a certain aspect of that order to obscurity” (1978:239). Ontological premises—that is, sociocentric or egocentric representations of the self—are an effort to capture an experience of self in language and condemn the alternative experience to obscurity. This initial obscurity, however, is not a *fait accompli* but the sand that makes the pearl. The order of things, at least when the things one has in mind are human selves, does not passively allow itself to be distorted. Rather, the experiences of self that are initially consigned to silence, and secondarily to prejudicial interpretation, are forever beleaguering the system of language and discourse with entreaties to be noticed and to be taken more fairly into account. The

inadequacy of lexicons and discourses, and of the cultural understandings of self implicit in them, posits a dialectical element in cultural systems of self, which are forever intent upon recapturing those dimensions of experience that they at first exclude.

Notes

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1. Another ethnographer who studied emotion in Samoa found that Samoans consistently attributed emotions to social circumstances and were at a loss to describe them as inner experiences (Gerber 1975:12–14).

2. See, for example, Lutz 1988 and Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990.

3. On this distinction see, for example, Dumont 1970:1–20; Geertz 1984[1974]:126; Fogelson 1982; Shweder and Bourne 1984; Levy 1983; Rosaldo 1984; Kirkpatrick and White 1985; Sampson 1988; Shore 1977:194–198; Harris 1989; and Markus and Kitayama 1991. Spiro (1993) questions the validity of this distinction, and I regard my theory as a possible answer to his question.

4. In her study of the moral culture of American blacks, Stack gives an example of such a hybrid (1990).

5. Similarly, White believes that a “to and fro” movement between premises and experience exists within the confines of discourse itself (1978:4).

6. Claudia Straus argues that interviews with anthropological subjects are heteroglossic and that their variant voices derive from multiple models of personhood (1990).

7. See Straus 1990 and Ewing 1990 for examples of this shifting between variant discourses on personhood.

8. On the question of representing oneself to oneself see further Ewing 1990.

9. “Faces” are images borrowed from the social milieu; therefore, the persona is an image-based premise for identity. In Holland and Quinn’s terminology (1987:24–32), one might say the persona (that is, a self-concept emphasizing role) is an “image schema” of the self, while those emphasizing inner experience tend to be propositional. For ethnographers who concur that Samoans see being a person in terms of role playing, see, for example, Mead 1937:286; Shore 1977:194–201; Duranti 1984b:2, 12.

10. *Agāga*, a word based on the root *aga*, is currently glossed as “soul,” which makes the definition of *aga* as “persona” seem improbable. *Agāga*, however, is a colonized word. In pre-Christian Samoa the most prominent single use of the term *agāga* was for spirits and ghosts (Turner 1984[1884]:16; Cain 1979:143). Thus, originally *agāga* referred to a disembodied identity. It is likely that missionaries translated *agāga* as “soul” because they believed that the soul constitutes identity and as such is that part of the self which survives after death.

11. The terms *aga* and *āmio* have been the subject of debate in the ethnographic literature. For a summary of this debate and my position in it see Mageo 1989.

12. In other words, one can surmise that if Samoans saw the inner self as the essential dimension of the self (which they do not), then they would see the self as unitary, just as in the Western folk model. One might also speculate that the breakdown of the Western folk model is correlated with more serious and positive attention being given to social role playing, that is, to the performative dimensions of selves.

13. Both private thoughts and feelings are said to grow up in the *loto* (Gerber 1975:187–189, 1985:135–136).

14. *Gāioioi* refers to a dance movement resembling that of an ant.

15. *Fa’apelepele* refers to behaviors that express affection: spoiling, doting upon, doing favors for, acting protectively toward, and so forth.

16. Instead they might be said to “hypolexialize” it. I thank Alex Bolyantz for suggesting the term *hypolexicalization* to me. Levy (1973:304, 1993:219) suggests that cultures “hypocognize” certain emotions, while “hypercognizing” others.

17. Like *agāga*, *fatu* is a colonized word. Originally *fatu* did not refer to a seat of the affections nor did it have romantic connotations (Pratt 1977[1862/1911]:137). *Loto* has escaped significant alteration, probably due to its primary significance to Samoan psychology.

18. Despite the antisocial connotations of the word, Samoan-Christian hymns often refer to raising the *loto* up to God, rather than the *fatu*. Because missionaries were concerned mainly about the inner self, *loto* has an important place in the Samoan-Christian lexicon.

19. One could also say that, in its simplest form, Samoan conscience consists of idealized *aga*. While *aga* signifies a social mask or role, *aga* is also the base of many terms that signify idealized forms of role playing. *Tonu*, for example, means “correct”; one who is a model of propriety is *agatonu*, such as a villager who has never been fined for improper conduct and is thus a model to others (Pratt 1977[1862/1911]:22). Perhaps it is for this reason that Shore was persuaded that *aga* referred to normative behavior and that both Shore and Ochs found the term *aga* so frequently in terms denoting virtues (Shore 1982:155, 157; 1983; 1984; 1985).

20. There are rare cases when a title holder is young and, therefore, will have the role of advising and ordering those who are older.

21. Shore bases his ethnography of Samoa on an explication of contexts (1977, 1978, 1982), dividing Samoan contexts into the categories “complementary” and “symmetrical,” terms that derive from Bateson’s categorizations of schismogenesis (1958, 1972). Complementary contexts are those between persons whose sociostructural roles are mutually supportive and call for respect; symmetrical contexts are those between persons whose sociostructural roles are similar and invite rivalry.

Shore’s categories involve a more subtle structural distinction than that between hierarchical and peer, as they include relations in which people may not be peers and yet in which participants are seen as similar. In ranked relations, for example, people inhabit different sociostructural categories and their relations are often rivalrous. They are not peers, and yet in certain situations they may replace one another; in this sense

they are alike. Thus brothers are ranked according to age and yet may substitute for one another in many activities and events. Several brothers may be in competition for the same title and in this sense can replace one another.

Shore's distinction is an excellent rendering of Samoan social structure, and of the social dynamics consequent to that structure. In compartmentalized discourses, however, Samoans confront a simplified set of alternatives; the choice is to treat people either as different or as similar because compartmental discourses are based on a binary set of "as if" distinctions rather than on real distinctions. Sometimes Samoan brothers engage in respectful discourse with one another, sometimes playful discourse, and in respectful discourse their real relative ranking may be reversed. I married a Samoan and he would often address even his younger brother as *ali'i*, "noble sir." This sort of reversal is characteristic of respectful discourse in which one assumes a self-deprecating attitude and elevates the other.

Shore is aware of the self-deprecating nature of respectful talk in Samoa. Further he distinguishes between a "formal" mode and an "intimate" mode of discourse; however, he seems to see these modes as corresponding roughly to complementary and symmetrical contexts, although he also shows that these contexts may be established by conversational cuing rather than by objective social structure. He does not, however, draw out the implications of the difference between discourse and those complex social structural categories that he so well delineates.

I have trouble with Shore's use of the term "intimate" for Samoan informal discourse because in English it implies close *interpersonal* relations. Many informal situations in Samoa do not take place between people who are intimate in this sense, as Shore realizes. I think this is significant because Samoans tend to see relations of difference between groups and relations of identity within groups, rather than relations as between different individuals who may become intimate. While Samoans tend to compartmentalize contexts as hierarchical or peer, Euro-Americans tend to compartmentalize them as public or private. By private they mean more or less intimate, referring to a close interpersonal relationship between individuals. On formal and informal discourses in Samoa see also Duranti 1981, 1984a, 1992, 1994.

22. On Salevao see further Schultz 1985:69 and Stuebel 1976:96.

23. For a discussion of the private parts of the body and sexuality as symbolically affiliated with the personal dimension of the self in Samoa, see Mageo 1992.

24. See further Turner 1977 on ritual, the deconstruction of social categories, and *communitas*.

25. On mock rivalry and the *pōula* see further Moyle 1988:207, 231, 234 and Mageo 1992:444–447.

26. See Turner 1984[1884]:181; *Institutions* 1954[1944]:13; and Gilson 1970:24, 56.

27. See Keesing 1934:55. See also Stair 1897:70; Stevenson 1892:3–4; *Institutions* 1954[1944]:13; and Meleisea 1987a:77, 1987b:19.

28. See Kraemer 1978[1902]:18; Davidson 1967:26–27; and Meleisea 1987b:12.

29. Serious fights between extended families (*āiga*) are still chronic. Often villages have an established feud between two *'aiga* that is long, bitter, and easily reawakened. See, for example, Shore 1982:7–36. My Samoan husband's natal village had so

sensitive and explosive an intravillage feud that it is the only topic he has asked me not to explore in my study of Samoa. Incipient hostilities between villages are also still common and are probably most evident in the brawls that often follow intervillage cricket matches. See O'Meara 1990:120–121 for an interesting example. Today, however, these confrontations merely vent local feeling and no longer lead to the adjudication of titles. In old Samoa final approval of a title appointment rested in the hands of the village in which the title resided. Still today the village from which the title derives may disagree with the court's decision and even threaten the court-appointed title holder, warning him not to return to the village, so that an official title-conferring ceremony is never carried out.

30. For further examples see the 1931 case *Novata v. Pasene* (L.T. 181930), American Samoa Land and Titles case 25-85; and *Seva'aetasi v. Fanene* 12/13/88 and Motion for Reconsideration 3/28/89. See also *Willis, Asuega and Sa'aga v. Galea'i, Fai'ivae, Tuitete, Anetere'a, Le'oso and Le'oso*, Land and Titles case 45-81, 3/12/89 or *Sialega v. Taito*, Land and Titles case 18-85, 7/22/86 and 10/23/86 (American Samoa Report 1987, 3:40–44, 78–80).

31. There are actually four criteria based upon which the court judges rival claimants, established by the local Samoan-controlled legislature (Section 6.0107 American Samoa Code). See American Samoa Digest 1982:91–124 for a summary and explanation of this code. The criterion cited, however, often turns out to be the most consequential (Mageo 1991b:26–27).

32. Fono are not ceremonies, and unlike the real *lāuga* of ceremonies, Duranti tells us this *lāuga* is "corrupt," "a mixed, spurious genre" (1992:173; 1993:85–112). In these qualities the fono *lāuga* resembles fono talk in a general sense.

33. This progression is probably related to that described by White (1978:1–25) as the progress of social consciousness and discourse from a naive to a self-critical comprehension of itself.

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