

spirit girls and marines: possession and ethnopsychiatry as historical discourse in Samoa

JEANNETTE MARIE MAGEO—Washington State University

Possession has typically been regarded either as hysterical psychosis or as culture-bound syndrome, or as a combination of the two (Langness 1976; Lebra 1976; Littlewood and Lipsedge 1985; Simons and Hughes 1985).¹ These approaches psychologize possession. Lambek argues that to treat possession primarily as a psychological phenomenon is to underassess possession's significance as cultural text and cultural discourse (1989). Possession is many kinds of text and enlists many discourses, but, given our discipline's enduring interest in historical specificity, it may be useful to regard possession as historical text and as historical discourse.² I hope to persuade readers that the characters who emerge in possession can embody era-specific voices, particularly when a society is undergoing rapid social change; the conflicts between possessing voices are often conflicts between layers of social history, sedimented one upon another. Inasmuch as voices in possession episodes speak out of the cultural-moral consciousness of a particular era, possession may offer a means to "ground subjective, culturally configured action in history" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:11) and to ground history in the inmost thoughts and feelings of cultural subjects.

Talk of possessed persons can be regarded as having a historical teleology that seeks the resolution of cultural-historical paradoxes suffered by the individual. I am not suggesting a reinvented functionalism in which possession exists because it resolves sociocultural problems. Rather, when possession exists, it is an available medium exploited by individuals to express and to think about problems that bear upon them and that may be of moral-historical significance. Individuals have an obvious investment in, and sometimes an excruciating need to contribute to the solution of, these problems, and they share these motivations with other members of their communities. Others are, therefore, likely to take an interest in these solutions.

I do not mean to reject a psychological approach to possession. The case presented here has rich psychological significance, not only for the victim herself but, as a repeated narrative, for her sister and for others in her society. One aspect of the psychological approach as it has been employed, however, invites contention. Although ethnographers see possession as a cultural phenomenon, in ethnographic accounts the difficulties that possessed people express and negotiate often seem merely their own.³ This individualistic bias is evident even in the excellent ethnographies of Lambek (1981) and Obeyesekere (1981). The Mayotte women possessed in *Human Spirits* and the Sinhalese female ascetics in *Medusa's Hair* are beleaguered by family,

Through an analysis of a case of possession I argue that possession can be read as historical discourse. The possessed person and the ethnoanalyst often do cultural-historical work useful to the larger society. The case examined casts light on Samoan moral history from missionization to the present and on how Samoans have reinvented traditions—not naively as the literature on cultural reinvention suggests, but as at least a partially self-conscious process. [possession, ethnopsychiatry, moral history, reinvention, Samoa]

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marital, and personal problems. These are problems that only Mayotte and Sinhalese women would have, but seem individual even though, as Obeyesekere points out, they have been successfully fit into a collective form. Indeed, Obeyesekere sees mental illness as an extreme departure into idiosyncrasy that possession and related phenomena amend.

It is also possible, however, that possessed people are, to use Obeyesekere's felicitous phrase, doing "the work of culture" (1990). He argues that possessed persons may provide hypnagogic symbols, meaningful to the larger society (1981). I argue that possessed individuals may be beset by moral-historical dilemmas that bear upon them personally; their apparent afflictions constitute creative attempts to contribute to collective understandings of these dilemmas.

This perspective on possession provides insight on the anthropology of gender roles. If women are the common "victims" of possession, as I. M. Lewis argues (1971), then women are the common practitioners of certain forms of moral-historical work, shaping the progressive transformation of cultural values. Possession could then be seen as a powerful form of praxis, where the practice is making moral history.⁴ Because in many societies women are not supposed to be powerful, victimization serves as camouflage for agency. The act of camouflage is usually unintentional, as women may experience themselves as spirit victims; and so it must be or the camouflage would not work. Camouflage is also necessary because of the transgressive quality of possession experiences. We will see that possession as a form of historical discourse takes a critical perspective on the past, exposing contradictions in ethos and cultural identity; therefore, people are apt to find it both fascinating and dangerous, and the issue of responsibility is hazardous.

Just as possession has been narrowly regarded as "non-Western" psychosis, folk treatment has been regarded as ethnopsychiatry. If possession is a discourse about historical problems, then ethnoanalysis may contribute to cultural work on dilemmas that are collective and historical. This is particularly true because possession sessions are often social events that involve the larger community in high drama. Retrospectively, possession becomes a focus of gossip and other forms of creative retelling. These retellings carry on the moral-historical work initiated by the possessed women; they assimilate new ideas to old schemata, feeding the transformation of those schemata, and feeding back into the future contours of possession experiences. As women tend to be viewed in many cultures as the agents of gossip, here again women might be seen as the typical agents of a historical praxis through which the ethos of a community is rewritten.⁵ In gossip, as in possession, people adopt discursive strategies in which agency and responsibility are submerged (Besnier 1989).

The role of retelling bears particularly on this article, which concerns a case of possession in Samoa. I call the possessed girl "'Aute" after the red Samoan hibiscus, sacred to many Samoan spirits. This case was not narrated at the time of the event by 'Aute, but more than a decade later by her younger sister, whom I call "Tusitala." The indirect quality of the account removes it—at least to a degree—from 'Aute's personal life and personal problems, repositioning her story in the sphere of cultural narration. This indirection also broadens the focus of my analysis, which concerns not only the girl herself but also Tusitala, whose mind we will in a sense come to know better than 'Aute's.

The facility, ease, and speed with which Tusitala spoke of events that at the time were distressing suggested a habit of narration. Repeated narration, like oral formulaic poetry (Lord 1964), may putatively aim at repetition but is more likely to vary and elaborate incipient themes, furthering the moral-historical thinking begun by the event itself. Some possession episodes are probably particularly "good to think" and are, therefore, retold more frequently than others. This quality bespeaks the virtuosity of the possessed person and of the person treating her.

To say that the possessed person contributes to moral-historical thinking is not to say that the term "victim" is entirely without justice, for the weight of moral history can be crushing, as it is in the Samoan case I am about to consider. Further, it is unlikely that all possessed persons

contribute to moral-historical thinking. In his writing on dreams Jung distinguished between dreams relating primarily to individual existence and those that relate to collective existence and social history arising from a “collective unconscious” (1960). A similar distinction might be made for possession episodes: some episodes may be merely personal, others entangled in puzzles of a larger nature. But even when the individual’s possession seems personal, it is better understood, from both the ethnographic and the psychological perspective, when contextualized in culture history.

If understanding possession requires a sense of culture history, the study of possession can shed light on a topic in culture history that is of current concern. Local notions of “tradition” are today often construed as attempts—motivated by political, economic, and psychological considerations—to make relevant a pastiche of historical record and cultural borrowings (Hanson 1989; Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983; R. Keesing 1990; Thomas 1992). In his work on Polynesia George Marcus refers to such traditions as “compromise cultures.”

By this term I refer to the first long-term adjustments of Polynesian cultures to European-American contact, in which Polynesian versions of Western institutions were created and older institutions and customs were censored, reorganized, and retraditionalized. These compromise cultures—earlier Polynesian versions of Western culture—now represent in indigenous perceptions, the traditions being subjected to rapid change. [1989:197]

On one level the case of possession considered in this article is an example of a compromise culture. Elsewhere I have argued that the genre of possession discussed here, as well as the genre of healing with which it is treated, are unacknowledged cultural inventions of fairly recent vintage, *mélanges* of the old and the imported (Mageo 1994, 1996). A naive definition of tradition seems implicit in Tusitala’s rendering of the events. She tells us her sister’s condition was not amenable to medical treatment with “pills” by a Western physician but demanded the herbs and services of a Samoan healer. This frame symbolically opposes what is foreign and modern to what is local and putatively hereditary.⁶ On another level, however, the episode and its treatment are forms of commentary on how change has been culturally accommodated. In this capacity they offer a critique of Marcus’s concept, constituting evidence that “natives” have a more sophisticated historical consciousness than anthropologists usually acknowledge.

In this possession case “tradition” and “modernity” are terms of an at least partially self-conscious cultural dialogue about Samoan sexual ethics and feminine identity, and about Samoan cultural identity. As Thomas (1992) points out, in Samoan colonial history sexual ethics became a sign for Samoan difference, and difference is a foil upon which cultural identity is constructed. I would add that here “sexual ethics” should be read as “women’s sexual ethics,” which were the focus of missionary concern. Thus feminine sexual identity became more defining and emblematic of Samoan culture in the colonial encounter than it was in Samoa’s pre-Christian past.

The possessing spirits that inhabit ‘Aute’s mind are remnants of a colonial problematization of sex and gender. The local healer cures by reading a colonial-historical confrontation articulated in ‘Aute’s spirit voices. Because history is a constituting element of her case and its treatment, unraveling this account will lead to constructing a moral history of Samoa since missionization. This history will help to clarify pre-Christian to Christian shifts in Samoan sexual morality, a topic that, at least since the Mead-Freeman debate, has perplexed anthropologists.

‘Aute is from the village of Sale’imoa, on ‘Upolu island, Western Samoa. Western Samoa is composed of two large islands and several smaller islands. ‘Upolu is the more urban of the two large islands, Savai’i, the more rural. ‘Aute was 17 years old at the time this episode occurred. I refer to her as a “girl” rather than as a young woman, because in Samoan terms to call her a woman would suggest sexual impropriety (Schoeffel 1979a:178; Shore 1981:204). ‘Aute’s father was part German, as are many Western Samoans. Germany was a major colonial presence in Samoa during the latter part of the 19th century, and Western Samoa was a Germany colony

from 1900 until 1914. On his Samoan side the father was said to be a descendant of Sauma'iafe, one of the two most famous female possessing spirits in Western Samoa (Letelesā being the other). I calculate that the incident took place in about 1970.

Tusitala had witnessed much of the episode. I knew her in the mid-to-late 1980s, when she was in her late twenties or early thirties. She was an in-law of a couple who were my close friends and she herself was a casual friend of mine. An American friend who also knew the couple mentioned to me that Tusitala's sister had been possessed because I was then researching Samoan possession. Although I saw Tusitala almost daily at that time, it was in public contexts where I thought she would have been embarrassed by my inquiries. We were sufficiently friendly, however, that she entrusted me with her phone number. I called her about some small practical matter and decided to chance asking about her sister. The version of the events that follows comes from my notes on that conversation.

'Aute's possession

'Aute had gone on a camping trip with the Girl Guides to legendary sites in Savai'i. Initially they visited a pool called Vai-o-Sina (Water of Sina) and bathed. Later they visited the caves at Pa'ia where the *'autotoe* (menehunes, "little people") were said to have lived. *Pa'ia* means both "sacred" and "to be touched" (Milner 1979[1966]:172). 'Aute was wearing red shorts, a red shirt, and a red flower in her long fair reddish hair. As she entered a cave, she was hit by an *aitu* ("spirit") and fainted. She was subsequently taken to a convent and later brought back to 'Upolu. The boat trip from Savai'i to 'Upolu usually takes only a few hours; on this occasion it took eight hours. The boatmen said they watched other boats passing them, as *aitu* on different ends of their craft pulled them back and forth between the opposite shores.

'Aute's family did not believe in *aitu*. The girl talked in an uncharacteristic fashion, however, and seemed either not to know or to ignore the members of her family; she would eat only bananas cooked in the *umu* (a traditional earth oven). 'Aute's face was flushed, her cheeks and lips were bright red, and she looked more beautiful than ever. Her parents took her to a German doctor, and she allegedly began conversing with him in fluent German. The girl's father spoke German, but 'Aute knew only a few words. The doctor gave 'Aute pills that had no apparent effect.

After three days a Samoan aunt suggested the family bring in a *faivai*. A *faivai* is a local healer who uses predominantly herbal drinks, and both herbal and regular massage to heal.⁷ 'Aute heard the *faivai* approaching and began to rave. When the woman arrived, the girl greeted her as a friend and kissed her. *Faivai* are often friends to spirits. The *faivai* massaged 'Aute with special leaves. The treatment induced unconsciousness and shortly thereafter three possessing spirits began to speak through 'Aute.

The first was a spirit called Sina, to whom the pool in Savai'i belonged. Sina said she had resented the group's bathing there and had possessed three of the girls. The second possessing spirit was a boy who spoke Samoan with a slight accent. The *faivai* believed that he was a marine pilot who had crashed in Savai'i during World War II. He said he had become "friends" with Sina but that when he saw 'Aute walking into the cave he had gone after her to touch her hair. It was for this reason, he explained, that Sina struck the girl and had desired to kill her. Sauma'iafe was the third possessing spirit. She said that she had come to 'Aute's rescue because the girl was a descendant. Sauma'iafe also said that it was she and two other spirit girls, Letelesā and an *aitu* called Teine o Honolulu (the Girl from Honolulu), who had tried to pull the boat toward 'Upolu, while Sina and the marine pulled it toward Savai'i.

The *faivai* promised Sina that 'Aute would never return to Savai'i. Sauma'iafe told the formerly skeptical family that one of their number would die within two weeks (the house girl died). The

spirits then left 'Aute's body. When she awoke, 'Aute was terribly hungry and ate a whole chicken. She looked old, shrunken, and haggard, and never regained her former beauty.

meanings

A preliminary word is in order about the following exegesis and its authority. This interpretation of the characters and events is my own, not Tusitala's; in her rendering of the events, however, Tusitala invokes and plays upon schemata that are typically used by Samoans in accounts of all kinds and that have a specific range of associations. Further, while I know of no other versions of 'Aute's possession, I do know many other Samoan possession stories that share the same symbolic grammar and operate by the same rules—stories to which I shall allude in my interpretation and to which I believe Tusitala is also alluding (Mageo 1991). Like most Samoan accounts of spirit possession, Tusitala's had the veridical tone of reportage rather than the style of moral commentary. Nonetheless, Tusitala's particular use of Samoan semiology and version of the events invite a moral commentary and within this commentary are traces of a moral history that I hope to explore and analyze.

Savai'i and 'Upolu are not merely geographical locations; they are insignia of moral-historical periods. 'Upolu is seen by Samoans as the more modern of the large islands, Savai'i as the more traditional. Thus Samoans often remarked to me that cultural practices that had died out in most of Samoa still existed on Savai'i. This perception, however, reflects a geographic symbolism rather than an actual sociology of place. In some cases more wealthy and urban areas, like Pago Pago, preserve customs that have fallen into disuse elsewhere. One of the sisters (Terry) of my Samoan husband had been adopted by a relatively wealthy American Samoan family that could afford to put on events calling for elaborate ceremony. Terry, therefore, knew more elaborate forms of ceremonial presentation than did her cousins who lived in a remote rural village in Western Samoa.

If 'Upolu represents Samoan modernity and Savai'i Samoan tradition, these periods themselves are tropes for different moralities. Both of these moralities are present in contemporary moral discourse in Samoa, just as Savai'i and 'Upolu are current locales. These moralities are in incipient conflict with one another and it is this conflict that is played out in 'Aute's possession. Evidence for this symbolism will be found in 'Aute's spirits, who had their own, conflicting interpretations of why the events in Savai'i took place as they did. In what follows I consider what was said by the spirits in dialogue with the faivai, as well as what the spirits purportedly did in the Savai'i incident. In each case, determining the significance of the spirits' words and actions shall require a detour into Samoan culture history.

Sina Through the action of hitting 'Aute, Sina evokes a Samoan schema about spirits and provides a subtext to the event. To be "hit" is a Samoan euphemism for possession, and this phrasing correctly indicates that Samoans see contemporary possession as punitive in nature (Goodman 1971:469; Mageo 1991:364–365). In Samoan stories about possession girls may perform a number of actions that provoke spirit attacks. Spirits may hit a girl if she wears her hair down, or if she wears a red flower behind her ear, particularly when walking on a *malae* associated with a spirit. A *malae* is a large open space that marks the center of a village. The *malae* at the village of Sale'imoa, for example, belongs to Sauma'iafe; the *malae* at Lepea belongs to Letelesā. A girl may also be "hit" for behaving in a self-exhibiting manner, particularly in a spirit's haunt, or even for wearing red clothes or having fair hair.

Spirit girls are typically described as having fair reddish hair, worn hanging loosely down and decorated with a red hibiscus. They are also said to glow red and to be extremely beautiful. Unlike Samoan-Christian women, they may go about only partially clad, feeling no shame about nakedness. In other words, spirits girls hit real girls for resembling them. We know that 'Aute

had fair hair and, at the time the incident occurred, was wearing her hair down, a red flower behind her ear, red clothes, and shorts (which Samoans regard as self-exhibiting). One or two of these aspects of dress may alone be sufficient to provoke possession. Tusitala was careful to give me these details about 'Aute's appearance when she began to tell the story, and a Samoan would regard them as causal factors. Tusitala's retelling, therefore, makes an implicit parallel—between what her audience thinks is the reason for 'Aute's possession (looking like a spirit girl) and what Sina says is the reason (bathing in the pool). Tusitala thereby portrays 'Aute's appearance as analogous to her illicit bath: her appearance is likewise a trespass on sacred ground and an illicit appropriation. The metaphoric character of 'Aute's bath is underlined by the fact that only three of the bathers are possessed and by the fact that 'Aute is not possessed immediately following her bath but later, after other critical events that are linked directly to 'Aute's appearance. One might say that what 'Aute really appropriates is Sina's image as a spirit girl. What, then, does this image with its characteristic embodiment and forms of self-decoration signify?

'Aute's appearance and attire are associated in Samoa with special sexual attractiveness and with *fā'alialia*, flaunting attractiveness. Long hair is a primary feature of feminine sexual beauty, so much so that Samoan beauty contests have been won and lost on the measurement of a girl's hair (Mageo 1994).⁸ Fair hair is thought to be extraordinarily pretty and occurs naturally, albeit rarely, in Samoa. Until recently, wearing one's hair down was felt to be similar to exposing secondary sexual characteristics. Wearing a flower, particularly a red flower, augments one's attractiveness. Red is associated with mana, and mana with sexuality in many Polynesian cultures (Goldman 1970; Luomala 1986[1955]; Shore 1989). Traditionally, Samoan women left their breasts exposed but covered their thighs because thighs had sexual associations. For this reason Samoan girls who grow up in Hawai'i and bring their shorts to Samoa will still be told to wear a lavalava over their shorts.

In contemporary Christian Samoa, to flaunt sexual attractiveness is *tautalaitiiti* (cheeky). *Tautalaitiiti* literally means "to talk above one's age" but refers to youthful disrespect in a general sense. Respect is the foundation of the Samoan moral order and people recount contemporary instances when spirits still sanction serious encroachments on respect. In Samoa being respectful is signified by cloaking the personal self. Exposing the personal self is a Samoan trope for disrespect; therefore, self-exhibiting behavior, particularly sexual self-exhibition among young people, is *tautalaitiiti* (Mead 1961[1928]:88, 137, 140; Mageo 1989b:394–397). This definition of *tautalaitiiti* needs qualification. The Samoan social world is divided into hierarchical and peer contexts (Shore 1977, 1982). In peer contexts one often expresses "as if" disrespect that is taken as a joke. In pre-Christian Samoa people would sometimes expose themselves as a way of joking; night dances, which were called "joking nights," featured self-exposure (Kraemer 1978[1902], 2:394; Pritchard 1866:78; Stair 1897:134; Williams 1984[1830–32]:247–248). We will see, however, that in Christian Samoa exhibitionistic joking became delegitimized for girls. In consequence, behavior that connoted flaunting one's sexual attractiveness (*fā'alialia*) also became *tautalaitiiti* for girls and a pretext for spirit attacks.

It would seem, then, that the real crime for which Sina possesses 'Aute is disrespect. This disrespect is conveyed by 'Aute's use of Sina's pool, but actually consists in 'Aute's breach of the Samoan-Christian dress code, a breach that further signifies 'Aute's desire to flaunt her beauty wantonly and, in effect, lure men. One suspects that Sina hits 'Aute for the crime of luring the marine. The Samoan world in which 'Aute lived as an adolescent had just begun to shed strictures about wearing shorts and wearing one's hair loose. 'Aute's possession, however, indicates that self-exhibiting actions still amounted to violations of spirit mores in her own mind.

Inasmuch as Sina censures 'Aute for flaunting and luring behaviors, she personifies a recriminatory moral stratum that Samoans today look upon as traditional. Sina's identity as "the voice of tradition" is supported by her status in Samoan legend. Like other spirit girls Sina is a

taupou. Taupou are ceremonial village maidens who represent ideal femininity in Samoa. Mata'afa Tui tells us, "Sina . . . by poetic convention, represents . . . all the taupou . . . in Samoa" (1987:38–39). Sina means "silvery white," like moonlight. Kraemer reports that Sina was a general name for taupou because taupou were kept indoors so their skin remained white and shining (1942[1902], 1:59). They were virgins and the ideal of virginity that they represent today counterpoints tautalaititi behavior and all that it connotes for girls.

Spirit girls, like Sina, could be said to reify those hereditary ethics associated with taupou, made newly emblematic of feminine gender by the experience of missionization. The neotraditional nature of spirit girls is inscribed in their most salient feature—long, unbound, streaming hair. In precontact Samoa, females wore their hair short, with the exception of a long tail (*tutagita*) worn by eligible girls (Freeman 1983:229; Mageo 1994; Stair 1897:121). Inasmuch as these spirit girls are characterized by their uncut hair, they represent a postcontact vision of female attractiveness. The missionary Stair (1897:211), who recorded Samoan precontact religious beliefs during the second decade after contact, typologizes indigenous spirits. None of his types resemble these fair-haired spirit girls. The first account I have found of them is in the late 19th-century work of the German consul Stuebel (1976), made nearly half a century after contact.

taupou and Samoan-Christian "tradition" If Sina embodies Samoan-Christian sexual ethics for girls, then to understand her fully requires an investigation of pre-Christian feminine ethics. As elsewhere in Polynesia (Ortner 1981; Sahlins 1981, 1985), in old Samoa sexual morality revolved around a logic of social ascent. Despite pretensions to a well-established social hierarchy spanning villages and districts, old Samoan society was fraught with status competition. The village was the basic political unit and the extended family (*'āiga*), the basic social unit. Everyone was supposed to be dedicated to advancing the status of village and family. This dedication dictated distinct sexual moralities to high status and common girls, respectively. High-status girls were decorated in a manner that flaunted their charms; but they were to remain virginal, allowing their *'āiga* to capitalize on their attractions through a formal marriage with the scion of another high status *'āiga* (Mageo 1994). Lower status girls operated in the manner of sexual entrepreneurs, capitalizing on their own attractions to lure high status partners who could raise their *'āiga's* status (Pritchard 1866:134–135; Schultz 1911:22–25, 30; Stuebel 1976:126–130; Williams 1984[1830–32]:117).⁹ A girl who eloped merely because of personal feeling (*āvaga ile loto o le teine*) was likely to be caught and punished (Schultz 1911).

The relative sexual independence of lower status girls resulted from a lack of rigid distinction between intercourse and common marriage, *āvaga* (Schultz 1911:28). Common marriage and intercourse were differentiated merely by the length of time the girl stayed with the boy; the birth of a child lending the final imprimatur to the relationship. Further, while the descendants of a formal marriage were most likely to inherit titles, the descendants of intercourse had rights in the father's family estate similar to those of the descendants of a common marriage. Indeed when the highest status men married informally, the marriage amounted to little more than intercourse (Pritchard 1866:135; Schultz 1911:30). Because in old Samoa common girls could gain advantages by seducing boys of status, flaunting and luring were countenanced.

Although Christian disapproval of pre-Christian ways had a definite impact, what Sahlins (1981, 1985) calls a "structure of conjuncture" between foreign ideologies and indigenous interests accounts for the Christian transformation of girls' roles. Two key factors were the decay of the *auauma*, an organization of the sisters and daughters of the village, and the utility of Christianity in competition for status.

While individual families advanced their status through their daughters' marriages, villages gained in status through taupou marriages to high chiefs. The village's status depended on that of its resident chiefly titles. Claimants for high titles were chosen on the strength of paternal and maternal lines. Belonging to an illustrious lineage was a prerequisite for being a taupou. The

descendant of a union between a high chief and a taupou, therefore, had a strong claim to the chief's title upon his death. Village aualuma sponsored a taupou, chaperoning her, flaunting her attractions at every occasion, and staging her wedding. Highly titled chiefs married serially, often entering into a new marriage after impregnating a taupou. Similarly, after the village had married one taupou, it would appoint another to maximize its opportunities to procure high titles. The aualuma, therefore, was more or less continuously involved in showing off taupou, finding chiefly spouses for them, and celebrating their weddings.

Marrying taupou was essential to forging the shifting military and political alliances upon which more centralized forms of governance relied in precontact Samoa (Gilson 1970:29–64; Schoeffel 1979b:2). Also important to forging alliances were the friendly relations and reciprocal obligations perpetuated by hosting traveling parties visiting the village, another responsibility of the aualuma. Receiving guests included entertaining them. Aualuma entertainments were often erotic in character (Moyle 1975:239, 1988) and provided occasions on which common girls might lure high status husbands from other villages. By occasioning these unions, the aualuma provided a further basis for alliance. The aualuma house was the formal weaving house of the village. There fine mats were woven; these were necessary for the ceremonial exchanges involved in the marriage of successive taupou and for ceremonial exchanges in honor of traveling parties (Meleisea 1987:7; Schoeffel 1979b:2).

During the first few decades after contact, while missionaries were securing a local footing, they tolerated high-status marriages in which the taupou lacked discretion about her marital partner and in which the partner was a high chief who practiced polygamy and serial monogamy, with a rapid turnover of wives. By the end of the 19th century, however, their condemnation of these marriages was adamant (Gilson 1970). Once chiefs took to monogamy, there simply were not enough highly titled chiefs to make a sufficient number of marriages to sustain the old system of taupou marriage whereby the village sought to increase its status. By the time Felix Keesing visited Samoa in the mid-1930s, few villages had a taupou (1937:1–14). "What is the use of having a taupo [taupou]," his informant complains, "now that we are not allowed to work it profitably?" (1937:7). The problem was "a glut in the taupo marriage market" (1937:7). Villages were reduced to marrying their taupou to lower status chiefs (1937:7). A lower-status chief might not even have the resources to enter into an equal ceremonial exchange with the village on the occasion of the taupou's marriage, let alone the status to sire offspring who could potentially elevate the village's status.¹⁰

All the erotic entertainments of the aualuma, particularly night dances, scandalized the missionaries, who did their best to suppress them (Gilson 1970:96; Moyle 1988:205–206). Christian ministers were frequently Calvinistic in orientation and allied themselves with government officials in an attempt to outlaw the exchange of fine mats. They believed that in these exchanges Samoans squandered time and resources better spent in copra production for European trade (F. Keesing 1937:9; Linnekin 1991). By the 20th century these Christian biases against the activities of the aualuma precipitated an obvious decline. According to Mead (1961[1928]:71, 77) the aualuma had lost its place in the socioeconomic system. This loss signaled a shift in the old sexual economy.

Because the aualuma was deeply involved in the marriage of taupou who maintained their virginity, membership in the aualuma meant that the more exciting activities of girls' social life revolved around the ideal of virginity in its association with marriages of status. Aualuma activities also underscored the limitations of this ideal, however, for the aualuma likewise sponsored entertainments during which informal "marriages" were apt to come about. As the aualuma became a more marginal institution, the meaning and the limitations of this pre-Christian ideal lost cultural instantiation, and the old significance of virginity in the context of ranking marriages was replaced by a Christian significance.

Christianity preached that one should get married in the church. This new version of formal marriage was called *fa'aipoipoga*. Schultz says this term was borrowed by the missionaries from the Rarotongan language because there was no term in Samoan for marriage that clearly demarcated formal and informal unions (1911:22). *Fa'aipoipoga* was then contrasted to marriages out of church, called *fa'apōuliuli*. Literally *fa'apōuliuli* meant "to make the darkness" or "the way of the darkness"; figuratively it meant "to marry in heathen fashion." By the 1950s Milner translated *tama fa'apōuliuli* as "illegitimate child." Today *fa'apōuliuli* has become the term for marriages conducted by young people without the sanction of church or family. Often in *fa'apōuliuli* families later recognize the marriage and then the couple marry in church; when recognition is denied, however, the girl returns home and the resulting child is deemed illegitimate. Thus the missionary idea that only formal marriages were valid qualified the status and privileges of offspring.

As early as the first decade of the 20th century, Schultz believed that the introduction of Christianity had "brought about important changes in the domain of the laws regulating marriage," but that the old views had "not yet disappeared" (1911:30). Informal elopement, as opposed to church weddings, long remained the most common form of marriage (F. Keesing 1934:412; Schoeffel 1979a:210; Schultz 1911:22). Nonetheless, a new and more limited understanding of legitimacy would explain the increasing Samoan compliance with missionary mores for girls. Inasmuch as legitimate offspring came to be identified as the descendants of those who had been married in church weddings rather than by elopement, female sexual flaunting and luring no longer served the status interests of the girl's family.

In a sense, Christianity began to replace *āvaga* as a route to status ascent. From contact onward, Christianity had been a pawn in the negotiation for status and authority. When the missionary Williams first placed Christian teachers in Samoa, for example, he left them with high chief Malietoa. Malietoa was in the process of becoming the paramount of Western Samoa and the island of Tutuila. Williams believed Malietoa to be something like a king and hoped to use him to facilitate rapid conversion. In fact Malietoa, like his fellow chiefs, was constantly vying for sovereignty and legitimization, and the teachers at once became a means to this end. Many Samoans were impressed with the efficacy of the Christian god, who produced such fine articles as ships and guns (Williams, quoted in F. Keesing 1934:396). They would gladly have heard "the good news," but Malietoa closeted the teachers, permitting them to speak only to those who first paid him their respects in a formal visit (Gilson 1970:76).

Like Christianity itself, it is probable that the Christian ideal of virginity was incorporated in an incessant Samoan wrangling for status. In old Samoa high-status marriages featured a defloration ceremony; therefore, among high-status 'āiga an eligible girl's guarded virginity was a claim about her family's prestige. The claim was that her 'āiga could contract those costly formal marriages that required lineage and virginity. In suggesting that all girls should be virginal, Samoan Christianity implied that all girls could make the facsimile of a high-status marriage, a notion that was exceedingly flattering to the dignity of lower-status 'āiga. This insinuation must have played well into the Samoan game of jockeying for status, to which all 'āiga were and still are devoted. To be sure, an actual high-status marriage remained beyond the means of most 'āiga. In many cases, therefore, the pre-Christian significance of female virginity was unlikely to be validated by a fancy wedding.¹¹ In the Christian system, however, a lack of visible confirmation for the importance of a girl's virginity could be better sustained because the worth of families or of individuals was interior and moral in nature.

In his study of Polynesian chiefs, Marcus suggests that today "the chiefly ideal of proper behavior has become synonymous with a populist one; it is a way of talking about exemplary personhood that anyone can approximate" (1989:191). This conversion of chiefly into popular ideals sheds light on the manner in which Samoan-Christians transformed pre-Christian notions about virginity. In the 19th century the missionary Stair tells us that "a few unmarried females

of the highest rank" were called *O Tausala*, which he translates as "titled ladies" (1897:115). When Schoeffel worked in Savai'i in the 1970s, however, *tausala* had become "the conceptual ideal of the adolescent girl" (1979a:139). The term still refers to a girl of "very high rank" but "in fact . . . encapsulates a set of ideal behaviors, qualities and attributes to which most Samoan girls learn to aspire" (1979a:139). In American Samoa "Miss Tausala" is the title of the girl who wins the local beauty pageant, a competition open to all unmarried females.

Girls also had an interest in a Christian elevation of their status. In Samoa those who have status work less because status is manifest in dignity (*mamalu*), and dignity is manifest in stasis. As the adolescent girl's status rose, it seems likely that the work expected of her lightened. In contemporary Samoa adolescent girls can pass most tasks down to younger siblings (Schoeffel 1979a:138–139). For Samoans status is closely tied to the perception of attractiveness. Girls who wished to be attractive, therefore, had additional interest in acquiring status. Today when a girl wants to be attractive to a boy, she may avoid doing her chores, pretending that others wait on her. So common is this predilection in modern Samoa that there is an expression for it. When a girl avoids her chores others may remark "Who are you *te'e* to?" (*O ai ā ete te'e iai?*). A *te'e* is a pole that holds up a clothes line. The idea is that avoiding chores is like standing up very straight, which in Samoa is tantamount to behaving with dignity. Behaving with dignity is behaving as if one had status. The question means, "Who are you trying to impress?"¹²

In pre-Christian Samoa a girl was accorded a status position in the *auluma*, based on the relative rank of her family. In post-Christian Samoa, a girl is accorded status at least partially on the basis of her virginity. A girl who is publicly known not to be a virgin is called *pa'umutu*, literally "cut skin," but I have often heard Samoans gloss it as "whore." A girl who flaunts her charms is suspected of not being a virgin. In 'Aute's possession, Sina embodies this Samoan-Christian demand for demure virginity that is now looked upon as traditional, but that originated in a democratization of the *taupou* ideal, in which in turn represents an appropriation of missionary ethics for the purposes of indigenous politics.

the marine The marine is the second speaker, and his interpretation of the possession event conflicts with Sina's. He blames himself for 'Aute's possession, saying that Sina hit 'Aute because he went after 'Aute to touch her hair. Like Sina's action, that of the marine calls up a complex set of Samoan cultural schemata. As mentioned above, in old Samoa the apex of the high status marriage ceremony was a defloration ritual. In this ritual either the boy, or his chiefly representative, broke the girl's hymen manually. Borrowing this marriage symbol, a Samoan rapist (*moetolo*, "sleep crawler") may touch the girl's genitals, breaking her hymen, rather than initiating intercourse (Freeman 1983:244–247; Schoeffel 1979a:184). In both of these cultural scenarios intercourse and touching (in the sense of having manual contact with a woman) are symbols for one another. In Samoa long hair symbolizes the girl's sex (Mageo 1994). If touching is a Samoan symbol of sexual intercourse, and hair a Samoan symbol of the girl's sex, it follows that the marine—who wants to "touch" 'Aute's hair—is someone who desires to act promiscuously. If the marine's intentions are in fact sexual, this would explain Sina's fierce jealousy; it does not, however, explain what the marine represents.

I have referred to the male figure in the episode as "the marine," but it is actually the *faivai* who attributes this identity to him in light of his accent in speaking Samoan. By referring to this spirit as a marine who crashed in Savai'i during World War II, the *faivai* interprets 'Aute's possession in light of an ethnohistory and implies that this character's meaning lies in the Samoan experience of this war.

As White and Lindstrom have said of World War II throughout the Pacific, military occupation bisected local history into "before and after the war" (1989). In Samoa this effect derived from the sheer intensity of foreign contact, described below by an unnamed European missionary:

For more than a hundred years Government officers and missionaries have mingled closely with the Samoans, and almost without exception this mingling has kept a nice respect for the distinctive courtesies demanded. . . . Samoan etiquette in speech and conduct is mightily involved and polite to an extreme; it is customary for Europeans to honour it with careful study and practice. But during the military occupation men fraternized very freely indeed with native people, approaching them, accosting them, using their houses as sprawling huts, doing violence to one cherished courtesy after another with complete indifference. The barriers were down, and easy association became epidemic. . . . Easy money and jealous love-affairs together with hushed up fatalities put the Samoans and the visitors on a common ground of ugly familiarity. . . . The war has gone, but it has left a poignant and indelible mark. . . . It should be said that most of the vices . . . obtained in smaller degree before the war, but were accelerated by the military occupation. [quoted in Stanner 1953:327–328]

As the missionary remarks, money was easily obtained during the war. From 1941 to 1945 savings bank deposits, many of them into Samoan accounts, rose nearly 320 percent (Stanner 1953:327; see also Gray 1960:245). Most remarkable, however, were wartime demographics. There had been contact between local women and foreign men in previous decades. Whalers, for example, visited Samoa particularly during the 1840s (Gilson 1970:165, 183). But the number of foreign men who inhabited Samoa in the early 1940s was unprecedented. In American Samoa the Tutuila naval station expanded most rapidly between 1942 and 1944. In 1942 there were 14,371 marines on Tutuila (Franco 1989). According to the 16th U.S. census conducted in 1940, there were 12,908 Samoans in all of American Samoa, a territory including Tutuila, the Manu'as, and several other small islands (U.S. Department of Commerce 1942[1940]). A Samoan describes island life during this period:

[T]he number of marines on the island was so tremendous you could hardly move . . . ships kept coming in, ships moving around the island, and ships anchored at the mouth of the harbor ready to come in. As soon as they finish unloading, they moved out, the next one came in, dropping off marines and supplies. . . . The marines came and took over the island. [quoted in Franco 1989:386]

In Western Samoa, between 1943 and 1944, there were between 25,000 and 30,000 troops present in a Samoan population of approximately 62,000 (Stanner 1953:325). The troops were concentrated on the island of 'Upolu, however, which had a proportionally much smaller Samoan population. Once the war began in earnest, there was also a lack of local men in the villages because of conscription work on war projects (Franco 1989:382). Samoan women did laundry for the servicemen and in general had considerable contact with them. As a result, there was

a great deal of sexual promiscuity . . . between Samoan or part-Samoan women and American troops. . . . Romantic, at least friendly, liaisons were very common. One mission society reported that in Upolu alone there were 1,200 known instances of illegitimate children by American soldiers from Samoan girls. . . . Some villages were said to have set up a special curfew for their girls, and at Falefa (near Apia) no troops except officers on business were allowed to enter the *fale* [house]. With troops so widely dispersed in an area so densely settled it was impossible to prevent familiar association. Many soldiers regularly visited girl-friends within the villages . . . the entrance-gates to the airport . . . became known among the Samoans as “the gates of sin.” [Stanner 1953:327]

Calling the airport gates “the gates of sin” suggests that Samoans had begun to apply missionary standards to the behavior of girls, although their motivations for doing so remained Samoan. A Western Samoan informant told me that, at this time, “the Samoan girls dropped many Samoan boys and go after those *papalagi* [white, Western-Europeans]. . . . Womens [*sic*] went crazy. Some went over to Satapuala, where the servicemen were stationed and hung around the gates.” Girls who did were called derogatory names like *tau le vae*, literally “fast legs,” figuratively “loose.” When the servicemen left, these girls went back to their old boyfriends and were called “leftovers.”

Songs, rhymes, and sayings I collected in Samoa associate various branches of the American military with female promiscuity. One song mocks the girls who dressed in Western style to please sailors and then hung around the Satapuala garrison in this song called—like the entrance to the airport—“the gates of sin.” “All of a sudden you paint your lips,” the song says, “Looking

for your heels to put on," but now "vanished are all the sailors of America, abandoning you on the mainstreet." Here follows a rhyme that was used to tease girls who became pregnant during the occupation.

*Eva, eva fo'i ma tama ole ami,
Ō tama ole 'ae tu'u ni tama'i ami.*

Roam, roam with the army guys,
The guys leave and left them with a little army.

The illegitimate children whose numbers reached epidemic proportions after the war were called *malini sē*, "errant marines."

The critical feeling toward young women's sexuality evident in this material may have been exacerbated by the anomalousness of servicemen. In old Samoa an important method of controlling young people's sexuality was the incest taboo (Kraemer 1978[1902], 1:11, 67; Pritchard 1866:125). Incest is broadly defined in Samoa and is inclusive of relations with the most distant and tenuous of relatives. Given this definition, one requires extensive genealogical expertise to know who exactly is a relative. Parents' knowledge of genealogy far exceeds that of their children. Today, when parents want a budding relationship terminated, they often still tell young people that they are related. This strategy may have been used extensively in old Samoa when a young person's circle of acquaintances was more circumscribed than it is today. It would not have worked, however, as a means of limiting relationships with American servicemen. GIs simply were not relatives. These new circumstances may have encouraged conversion to Christian ideas about virginity. Where old ethics do not apply, people draw upon new ones.

Christian sexual love If the marine stands for one of 'Aute's inner voices, this voice is that of the sexually assertive girls who hung about the gates of Satapuala. Their sexuality differed in important respects from the assertiveness of pre-Christian girls, however, as it was likely to have been associated with a distinctly Western form of sexual sentiment—that is, with "love" in an American sense of the word. Servicemen may have had cavalier attitudes toward Samoan girls, but they also carried with them their own culture's sexual discourse and probably tended to be romantic, even if they employed romance only as a rhetoric for seduction. The English phrase "in love" has no real Samoan translation. When my husband was growing up in the 1960s, cheeky Samoan boys boasting of their sexual prowess would tell girls, "Watch it or you will speak English." By this they meant, "I'll make you say you love me." It seems likely that the American servicemen who populated Samoa during World War II had originally made Samoan girls speak English by teaching them to say, "I love you." Today many Samoan love songs use the word *alofa* for romantic love, but this usage goes against the grain of the word's older intent. Shore tells us that boys who have *alofa* for girls explicitly do not make love to them (1982:228–229).

For old Samoan society, in which a daughter's marriage was an important route to social ascent, the idea of mating for reasons of personal sentiment had dangerous implications. We have seen that the sexual independence of lower-status girls was tolerated, as long as they acted in the status interests of their families. A danger in this sexual system had long been acknowledged: the girl's inner feelings might become so strong in relation to an inappropriate (low-status) sexual partner that she would elope, gainsaying her parents and other relatives (*āvaga i le loto o le teine*). In Samoan the word *loto* refers to private thoughts and personal feelings. The phrase *momo i loto* means "inner yearning" or "inner longing" and is used to describe the feelings of a girl who runs off with a boy and is brought home but then runs off again. In these cases friends may counsel parents that there is nothing they can do. Clearly, passion for a specific individual in sexual relations is not confined to Euro-American cultures. But in old Samoa this phenomenon was viewed as something of a hurricane, a misfortune in the face of which resignation was appropriate. It was not cultivated.

Christian missionaries to Samoa, however, encouraged a general shift in values that favored the development of personalized sexual sentiment among Samoan girls. The London Missionary Society and the Wesleyans were those missions that took responsibility for Christianizing Samoa (Gilson 1970:65–94). The London Mission itself was comprised of a broad array of Protestant sects, including Evangelicals, Presbyterians, Independents, and Methodists (Gailey 1993:295; Perry 1974:11). The sects that originated both missions strongly promoted ideas of personal religious feeling and experience (Davidoff and Hall 1987).

In late 18th and 19th century England, the idea that girls should marry for love rather than for the advance of family wealth and status had become a popular theme in such novels as Richardson's *Clarissa* (1985[1748]) and Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1976[1847]). These novels made the case that only love marriages had moral consequences. Novels were held suspect by missionizing Protestant sects, and romantic attraction was played down in missionary discourse, yet missionaries did express the view that marital partners should choose one another for their spiritual compatibility (Davidoff and Hall 1987:219–221, 323, 437). From the earliest days of contact missionaries expressed disapproval of Samoan marriages contracted for political and economic reasons (Williams 1984[1830–32]:77).

Missionaries to Samoa paid special attention to the training of girls. In old Samoa girls slept in the house of the aualuma, called "the house of the group of pearls," while the boys slept in the house of their association (Brewer 1975:38–40; Kraemer 1978[1902], 2:76–77; Meleisea 1987:7; Schoeffel 1979a:433; Stuebel 1976:126–131). Many Christian pastors thought that the virtue of the "pearls" was inadequately protected in the aualuma house and preferred young women to reside with them (Mead 1961[1928]:68, 156–157, 264–265). In the 1920s, and probably before, missionaries said that a girl "should make her own choice" in marriage (Mead 1961[1928]:101), meaning that partners should be chosen on the basis of inner—albeit "spiritual"—feelings. This Christian orientation to marriage made it more likely that eloping girls would favor personal feeling over considerations of status, bringing their sexual independence and their families' interests into mutual opposition. This opposition would have enhanced the appeal of stricter controls on girls' sexuality, like those proposed by Samoan Christians. Ironically, because the war led to a further relaxation of traditional controls on sexuality, it may have helped to promote conservative Christian standards for female cloistering and virginity.

In summary, the marine is associated with a "modern" sexual assertiveness, like that of the girls who hung around the gate of military garrisons, and with a flowering of personalized sexual sentiment. Sina and the marine together might be seen as representing a period (probably spanning the middle decades of this century) when Samoan Christian ethics for girls became prominent sexual regulators, while at the same time personal sexual freedom became salient in girls' behavior.¹³ In this episode 'Aute is blamed for the conflict between these competing historical currents. Here "blame" can be seen as signifying that this problem in cultural history has become 'Aute's personal (inner) conflict, a conflict so acute and dangerous as to be life-threatening.

Sauma'iafe Sauma'iafe is a composite figure. This is first obvious in her representational status vis-à-vis the trinity of spirit girls, consisting of Sauma'iafe herself, Letelesā, and the Girl from Honolulu. Sauma'iafe can be seen as a metonym for this trinity: she is teamed with them in the tug-of-war over the boat but is the only one of the three who actually speaks. She says that she intervened on 'Aute's behalf, but it was actually the trinity that did so. As a composite, however, Sauma'iafe also amalgamates Sina, the marine, and 'Aute.

Sauma'iafe resembles Sina. Like Sina in this episode, Sauma'iafe is known to punish girls who wear their hair down—especially if it is fair, and when a red flower is worn behind the ear—just as Sina punishes 'Aute. The episode also draws a structural parallel between Sina and Sauma'iafe. Sina desires to kill 'Aute; Sauma'iafe predicts the death of the housegirl. Here

prediction (one of the benign functions of spirits) serves as an analogue for causation: rather than causing a death, Sauma'iafe predicts one. 'Aute's relatives feared for her life (because she would not eat), but the house girl actually dies. Thus the house girl takes 'Aute's place and serves as a substitute victim. In other words, as 'Aute is Sina's victim, the house girl holds the place of the victim in relation to Sauma'iafe.¹⁴

Sauma'iafe also resembles the marine. She is sexually aggressive; tales have long been told of her visits to boys in their homes late at night for the purpose of intercourse (Stuebel 1976:94–95). Like the marine, Sauma'iafe pursues lovers and “touches” them.

Sauma'iafe resembles 'Aute as well. 'Aute and Sauma'iafe share fair reddish hair. Sauma'iafe is often described as extremely beautiful and as glowing red (Kraemer 1949[1923]:16A). Tusitala describes 'Aute as extremely beautiful and as flushed during her possession. Because they are relatives, however, 'Aute's likeness to Sauma'iafe is legitimate and not disrespectful; relatives are said to be “one body and one blood.”

By alluding to their kinship, Sauma'iafe's implicates 'Aute's family in the events and underscores the significance of descent in 'Aute's appearance. While it is true that fair hair represents an old genetic strain in Samoa, this color also bespeaks 'Aute's Germanic heritage. Samoans associate fair hair with mixed blood. My husband, for example, had a tendency to imagine that we would have fair-haired babies even though I am a brunette. Generally, the fair hair of Samoan spirit girls may refract the combined admiration (spirits are high status) and suspicion (spirits are often destructive) that Samoans feel for fair-colored foreign visitors. Further, fair hair may reflect a tendency to embed mixed feelings about the foreign in images of chiefness. Sahlins (1981, 1985) argues that Polynesians tend to see chiefness as alloyed with foreignness and that this tendency has characterized colonial experience from its beginnings. If spirit girls concatenate images of the colonial and the chiefly, they are nonetheless an emblem of Samoan difference in the context of missionization, since missionaries see spirits as heathenish and to be cast out. As a mixed-blood family, part-German but also descended from a spirit (as are the oldest chiefly families in Samoa), 'Aute's family would have evoked this mixed symbolism for the larger community. For this reason, they probably felt the mixed feelings enfolded in this symbolism more keenly than others.

If Sauma'iafe is like Sina, the marine, and 'Aute, she is different from them as well, and this difference signifies the potential progress that 'Aute makes during the episode and during the possession session. When describing spirit girls in Western Samoa, informants usually say that there are three such girls, supplying the names Sauma'iafe and Letelesā consistently, and then adding a third name that often differs between informants. One of my informants suggested that the Girl from Honolulu is Pele, who likes to visit Samoa now that there are airplanes.¹⁵ Indeed, Sauma'iafe and Letelesā too are said to travel around in motorcars and on airplanes (Mageo 1991:361; Schoeffel 1979a:406–407). Like 'Aute herself, the trinity of spirit girls is truly contemporary and in intense contact with the modern world.

Stories of Sauma'iafe, Letelesā, and the Girl from Honolulu allude to either recent events or to events in historical time, although they often relate to events that precede written history (Cain 1971, 1979; Goodman 1971; Kraemer 1949[1923]; Stuebel 1976). By way of contrast, Sina is simply the most common girl's name used in old tales about human girls (Moyle 1981; Schultz 1985[1949–50]; Stuebel 1976). Her pool in Savai'i is the scene of a “once upon a time” sort of story, a *āgogo* in Samoan terms, about the origins of coconuts (Ma'ia'i 1960:14–17). Its frame is mythic time.

If Sauma'iafe is unlike Sina in her contemporaneity, she is unlike the marine in being Samoan. It seems likely that in this episode Sauma'iafe stands for an indigenous version of all that the marine represents, linking his new morality to older patterns in Samoa's pre-Christian past. Like the crashed marine pilot, Sauma'iafe may fly on airplanes, but she acts like girls in pre-Christian Samoa. At that time, as Schultz says, “As far as it is possible to deduce from the old legends

. . . proposals were made also by the women" (1911:22). Women's freedom of choice is apparent, for example, in a legend about two brothers, one older and plain, the other younger and handsome. In Samoan thought the older is the likely heir to family titles and should, therefore, be considered the more attractive. In the legend, however, both brothers court a chiefly girl, surrounded by a host of chiefs intent upon marrying her. She prefers the handsome younger brother. Calling to him she says, " 'You, sir, come here,' . . . Instead, the youth stood up, to go home, but suddenly the girl also stood and followed him. Off they went, the youth being chased back, and the girl following along behind, wanting to become the youth's wife" (Moyle 1981:122–123). Disgruntled, the old brother proposes a wife-getting contest: both boys are to roam about different parts of the village to see who follows them. Pausing to examine the girls trailing behind them, the brothers discover that those who have pursued the elder brother are hunchbacked, ulcerous, blind, and deformed. Those who have pursued the younger brother are comely (Moyle 1981:125). Traditionally, in an *āvaga* (elopement) the girl accompanied the boy back to his parental estate and hence might be seen as following him back to his home.¹⁶

A further contrast between the identities of Sina, the marine, Sauma'iafe, and the trinity of spirit girls, is suggested by the tug-of-war over the boat. The boatmen tell us that spirits pulled the boat back and forth, but it is not until Sauma'iafe speaks that we discover which spirits were on which side. As explained by Sauma'iafe, this tug-of-war reconfigures the episode's definition of "tradition." Originally, Sina stands for tradition in contrast to the Marine, who stands for modernity. By pulling the boat toward Savai'i, Sina and the marine act in concert, both taking the side of Savai'i and thereby changing the geographic definition of "tradition" before our eyes. If Savai'i equals tradition, but is also equal to Sina plus the marine, then what is "traditional" is continually being updated, turning out to be Samoan-Christian morality (Sina) plus colonial-sexual experience (the marine), or the incipient conflict between the two.

Sina and the marine represent the retarding nature of this colonial past, just as they retard the boat's progress. The trinity of spirit girls pulling the boat toward 'Upolu represents the draw of a postcolonial future, prefigured by Sauma'iafe. As the third speaker, Sauma'iafe is the fruit of a mediated dialogue between Sina and the marine and would, therefore, seem to represent a potential integration of Samoan Christianity and colonial sexual experience. It is by glimpsing the possibility of melding these discordant historical strata that 'Aute saves herself from the self-destructiveness signified by Sina (who wished to kill 'Aute).

Despite her apparent rescue, however, 'Aute lingers in a liminal state of possession. Like the boat, she is dangerously at sea between two directions, and this is her difference from Sauma'iafe. Her liminal state reflects her historical period, when recovery can only be partial: in the terms of the episode, 'Aute never regains her former beauty. Beauty is an aspect of image or persona. Persona is social image—that is, the way one is perceived by others in society or what is often called "face." 'Aute's state after her possession indicates she is returned to sanity but diminished in her persona, at least according to her sister's version of the tale. This version rings true, however, for the motif of a girl's image suffering through spirit aggression, at least temporarily, is common.

Being hit by a spirit can result in either possession or deformity; fingerprints may appear on the face or the face may become *gutupi'o*, "bent mouth." When a girl is actually entered by a spirit, the settlement by which the spirit is persuaded to leave more often than not involves cutting off the girl's long hair. Hair is one of the most treasured features of a girl's attractiveness in Samoa; therefore, this loss is emblematic of an impairment to her image or persona. In Samoa the persona is the predominant form of identity (Mageo 1989a, 1995). 'Aute's diminished image thus indicates continuing personal or cultural identity problems.

The partiality of 'Aute's cure is evident not only in her enduring injury but also in the deal that the faivai strikes with Sina. 'Aute is never to return to Savai'i. If Savai'i represents a part of 'Aute's self, then this solution suggests a permanent, if prophylactic, dissociation rather than

integration. It is significant that 'Aute later moved to New Zealand. 'Aute's shorts—what is worn by one's relatives in Hawai'i—on a camping trip are an identification with the "modern-foreign" aspects of Samoan culture. In contrast, her possession itself and her refusal during her possession to eat food not cooked in an umu imply an identification with Samoan culture—although, in light of her later migration, it was evidently a failed identification.

Whatever its implications, Samoan girls who are possessed are often packed off to other locations by relatives who fear for the girls' safety. I know of one case in which a fair-haired girl woke up from her possession (which took place in Samoa) in Hawai'i and was forbidden to return to Samoa. Girls are transported to Samoan communities in Hawai'i, in various cities on the west coast of the United States, and in New Zealand. These communities usually maintain a somewhat diluted version of the Samoan values system, as indicated by the tendency of Samoan girls to wear shorts in Hawai'i. By placing girls in a different sociocultural milieu, this geographic remedy does to a degree distance girls from older Samoan values and value conflicts and this removal often has a salutary effect. One of my affines who was frequently possessed when growing up in Samoa has suffered no recurrences since moving to Arizona. While girls' acute symptoms may abate outside Samoa, one wonders whether 'Aute or girls like her can so easily escape the discordant voices of their own inner lives.

As Kristeva says of texts, 'Aute's soul is a "mosaic of quotations" (1980:66). As a Samoan 'Aute would have heard stories about Sina, Sauma'iafe as an ancestress and a spirit girl, Letelesā, pools and caves and other sacred places in Savai'i, cheeky girls and what happens to them, girls chasing after boys to become their wives, and possession episodes, all her life. Cultural subjects live in a semantic world made up of the interrelations and collisions of stories, as stories about dignified Christian girls in Samoa collide with stories about night dances.

One might wonder if 'Aute, like the reader in Barthes's *The Death of the Author*, is "simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which . . . [culture] is constituted" (1977:148). Yet 'Aute's exteriorized intrapersonal drama rewrites these traces. Sauma'iafe does not generally play so supportive a role in possession. Here Sauma'iafe is 'Aute's own mosaic: Sauma'iafe represents an attempt to make inherently conflictual cultural stories cohere in one persona, a persona to which 'Aute aspires. In possession there is no need to proclaim the "death of the author," for this dispatch is constitutive to possession narratives: their human author is putatively absent. And yet, just as our obsession with the individual author and the obsession with the individual subject implied by it is, as Barthes rightly observes, distortive to an understanding of narratives, the vanishing of the author is likewise a cultural ruse. If there is no one author of this story, 'Aute is an author, so is the ethnoanalyst, so is Tusitala, and so am I, no less so for the fact that we are entangled and that the line demarcating us from one another may be in some respects difficult to draw.

endings

In the introduction to this article I argued that (1) characters who emerge in possession often embody era-specific voices; (2) the problems suffered by possessed individuals may be historical in nature; (3) through possession and its treatment individuals may seek to resolve these cultural-historical problems, exposing contradictions in ethos and cultural identity in the process; (4) possession and its treatment may constitute a form of commentary on these moral-historical contradictions; (5) possession and its treatment are powerful forms of historical praxis; (6) victimization in possession may be camouflage for agency; and (7) retelling carries further the moral-historical work initiated by a possessed person.

We have seen that Sina and the marine are era-specific voices. 'Aute's problems are not merely her own but reflect problems in Samoan moral history. Her possession points toward contradictions in ethos and cultural identity, represented by Sina and the marine. By identifying

the second speaker as a marine, the faivai has a particular role in exposing these contradictions and in writing social commentary. Both the episode and its treatment constitute creative attempts to contribute to the cultural conceptualization of opposing aspects of colonial experience in Samoa. Through the figure of Sauma'iafe, 'Aute and her faivai make significant progress in thought about the moral-historical conflict that Sina and the marine represent; Sauma'iafe evinces an articulation of old cultural currents with new directions.

When I describe possession and its treatment as powerful forms of historical praxis, I intend a struggle not for control but for meaning. I take meaning to be the same as relatedness, as in Lévi-Strauss's idea of bricolage and of myth (1966, 1970; cf. Mageo 1992). The discovery of meaning in 'Aute's case is a discovery of relatedness among the shards of history. There are many who would see this case of Samoan possession as a discourse about who controls whom—male or female, native or stranger, spirit or human (Karp 1989). It is true that these characters are, at the opening, locked in destructive historical antagonisms. In these antagonism what is seemingly new would controvert custom (as 'Aute's shorts controvert the Samoan way) and what is seemingly old would kill what is young, brightest, and best (as Sina would kill 'Aute). It is also true that all the characters in 'Aute's internal drama want to act on her: Sina wants to keep 'Aute and girls like her out of sacred pools, the marine wants to "touch" her, and Sauma'iafe, in a protective gesture that nonetheless parallels Sina's, wants to keep 'Aute out of Savai'i. But this adversarial struggle, indicating a lack of relatedness among the moral-historical strata of 'Aute's inner life, is precisely the problem that 'Aute, through the episode, seeks to amend. Sauma'iafe is 'Aute's tutelary spirit and alter ego. She is a uniting figure, in which the dissenting elements of 'Aute's inner world coalesce, at least in a symbolic prefigurement. As such, Sauma'iafe embodies an attempt to give new meaning to feminine sexual identity and to Samoan cultural identity.

If 'Aute is engaged in making moral history in her possession, then her status as a victim may be in part camouflage for agency. If one regards her as an agent, then never regaining her former beauty may be a rejection of an impossibly problematic gender identity and a rejection of her sexual attractiveness. I suggest that this rejection is shared by her younger sister.

Tusitala, like 'Aute, had fair hair. For several years Tusitala dyed it dark. Fair hair is thought highly attractive in Samoa. When Tusitala stopped dyeing her hair, she was reluctant to admit having done so, at least to me. The American friend who first told me that Tusitala's sister had been possessed also mentioned her dark-haired phase. I asked Tusitala about it one day after the telephone conversation. At first she denied ever having changed her hair color; then she admitted it, but denied that the change denoted anything other than the whimsy of a young woman. The reason attributed by others who knew her, however, was that she was afraid of being possessed like her sister. By this apparent act of disidentification, Tusitala signified a deeper resemblance between herself and her sister: her gesture might be read as a statement to the effect that "there but for the color of my hair go I."

Tusitala's clothing was always drab. She was thin, self-consciously so. I once called her slim and she jokingly thanked me for not calling her thin. Another time I unthinkingly called her thin; she frowned and her body visibly tightened. I wondered if she was anorexic. The reader will recall that abstinence from food was one of her sister's symptoms while she was possessed. Anorexia, even slimness, is an unusual condition in Samoa because beauty is associated with plumpness. My Samoan mother-in-law was wont to remark to my husband as his sister grew rounder, "Look how beautiful she's getting." It may be that Tusitala, by dyeing her hair and eating moderately, expressed an ambivalence about her attractiveness and about sexuality that was captured by her sister's possession and refracted in her retelling of the events. It is as if Tusitala's own story begins where 'Aute's ends.

If Tusitala wears the badge of her sister's struggles, this badge no longer entirely reflects Tusitala's own struggles. By the time I knew her, Tusitala was happily married to a handsome,

well-mannered, and well-placed young man who was an excellent match by Samoan standards. Perhaps the historical imagination reaches resolution only through a long process of creative retellings, mariners' rhymes repeated by besieged souls. Perhaps retelling her sister's story helped to give Tusitala's own a happy ending. Tusitala suggests to us that those who are possessed do moral-historical work for others. But 'Aute does not only work for her Samoan sisters; she enriches our understanding of the possession phenomenon itself, of ethnopsychiatry, and of local ways of thinking about the past.

notes

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1. Herein I refer to possession as opposed to "trance possession" (Bourguignon 1969, 1973). "Trance possession" refers to episodes entered into voluntarily by a religious technician for healing or for other explicitly ritualistic purposes.

2. Of the existing ethnographies on possession, Boddy's *Wombs and Alien Spirits* (1989) is most in sympathy with my project. Boddy argues that possession "chronicles the external world's dynamic impingement on village reality" and is a medium through which people deal with the "spectacle of the other" but also through which women mediate a "historical dialectic of acquiescence and resistance" (1989:301, 347). I go a step further: through possession and talk about possession not only do women deal with history—and do so for their society—possession is also a way women make moral history.

3. Thus Karp remarks of many possession studies "the meanings they unpack . . . are related to psychological and experiential dilemmas that are a result only of the social situation of the people involved" (1989:92).

4. In a related argument, Karp suggests that possession represents a capacity to exercise and create power, although he relates this power to tapping the energy of nature (1989:97).

5. Thomas describes a similar rewriting process but seems to see the agents primarily as men—native and colonial—involved in politics (1992:221).

6. Macpherson and Macpherson (1990) see indigenous Samoan medicine as originating largely during the colonial period.

7. A *fofo* (masseur) specializing in spirit complaints may also be used. For a fuller description of the *faivai*, see Macpherson and Macpherson 1990.

8. On hair symbolism, see Leach 1958. For a response to Leach's argument and for further ideas about what hair signifies in Samoa, see Mageo 1994.

9. Sloan found this distinction in evidence in Samoa of the 1930s (1940:248–249).

10. Felix Keesing (1937) argues that with the establishment of stable colonial governments in Western and American Samoa the political purpose of *taupou* marriages was nullified. He sees this purpose as uniting municipalities.

11. Today, as Samoan families become wealthier in American Samoa, Hawai'i, New Zealand and elsewhere, they engage in more and more elaborate demonstrations of wealth at wedding ceremonies, signifying high status. Cluny Macpherson has documented the New Zealand case (1991).

12. A similar expression is used of boys, *O le fa'ateteine ia*, which glosses as "he is uneasy around girls," but actually means that he does not want to do his chores when girls are near, so that he will appear to be of high status.

13. I have argued elsewhere that so intense was the resulting psychological conflict for girls that the result was a possession epidemic (Mageo 1994, 1996).

14. Samoan parents may say "*Oti mai nei*," "Death comes now," when they hit children; therefore, there is an association in Samoan childhood between death and being hit. As being hit is a euphemism for possession, there is also an association between death and possession. A victim whose possessing spirits will not speak may die (Shore 1977, 1978).

15. Based upon oral tradition, Kalakaua believes that Pele was a Samoan who migrated to Hawai'i about the year 1175 (1972[1888]:140).

16. The girl who eloped was called *avagaga*, a derivative of the term *avaga*. There is no term for the eloping boy. In listing the Samoan terms for "to marry" the early missionary-linguist Pratt says that *avaga* is the verb used in reference to a woman (1977[1862]:90). When a lower-status couple did not elope, the boy might simply move in with the girl's family.

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