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**PACIFIC ISLANDS
STAKEHOLDER
PARTICIPATION
IN DEVELOPMENT:
SAMOA**

Antony Hooper

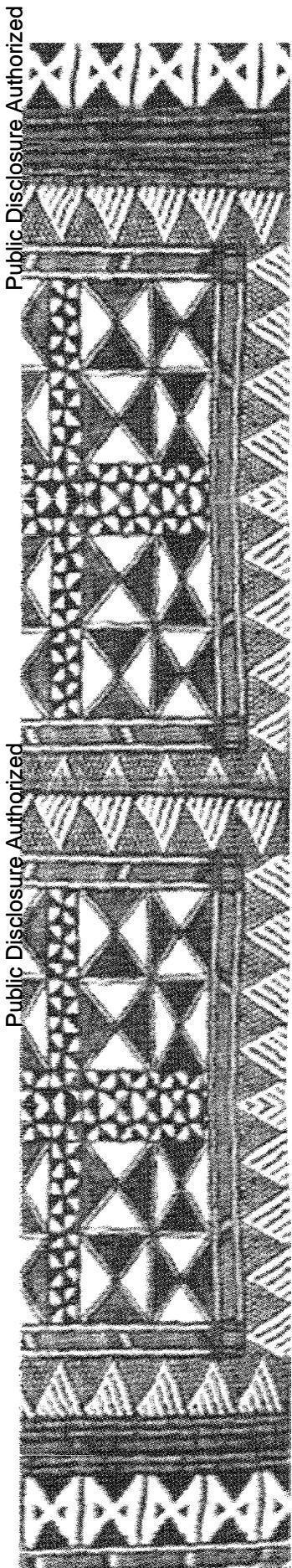


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PACIFIC ISLANDS
STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION
IN DEVELOPMENT:
SAMOA

February 1998

A Report for the World Bank

Prepared by: Antony Hooper

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FOREWORD

As in all societies, prospects for economic and social development for Pacific Island economies are conditioned by the country's social fabric, cultural heritage and traditions, all of which exert a powerful influence over the pattern and prospects for development. Recognising this, when providing analytical advice and support for policy makers in Pacific economies the World Bank is obligated to move beyond a perspective that focuses merely on economic factors to one that incorporates each society's social and cultural dynamic and which acknowledges the influence these aspects play in social change and economic decision-making.

The series of Stakeholders studies was initiated in 1996 in order to provide a basis for this broader approach and, over the ensuing twelve months, reports have been prepared for Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Kiribati. For each country the form of the study has varied, reflecting differences in the social and organizational characteristics of each culture. In some, the role of traditional or customary organizations is stronger and more pronounced; in others, formal community structures and organizations may be less defined or play a different role in various parts of the country and in relation to different spheres of social life. The linkages between traditional and introduced structures of power are also different in each country: in some, the boundaries may overlap quite clearly; in others, the functions of the government, the role of the church and the strength of traditions, for example, may continue to be quite distinct.

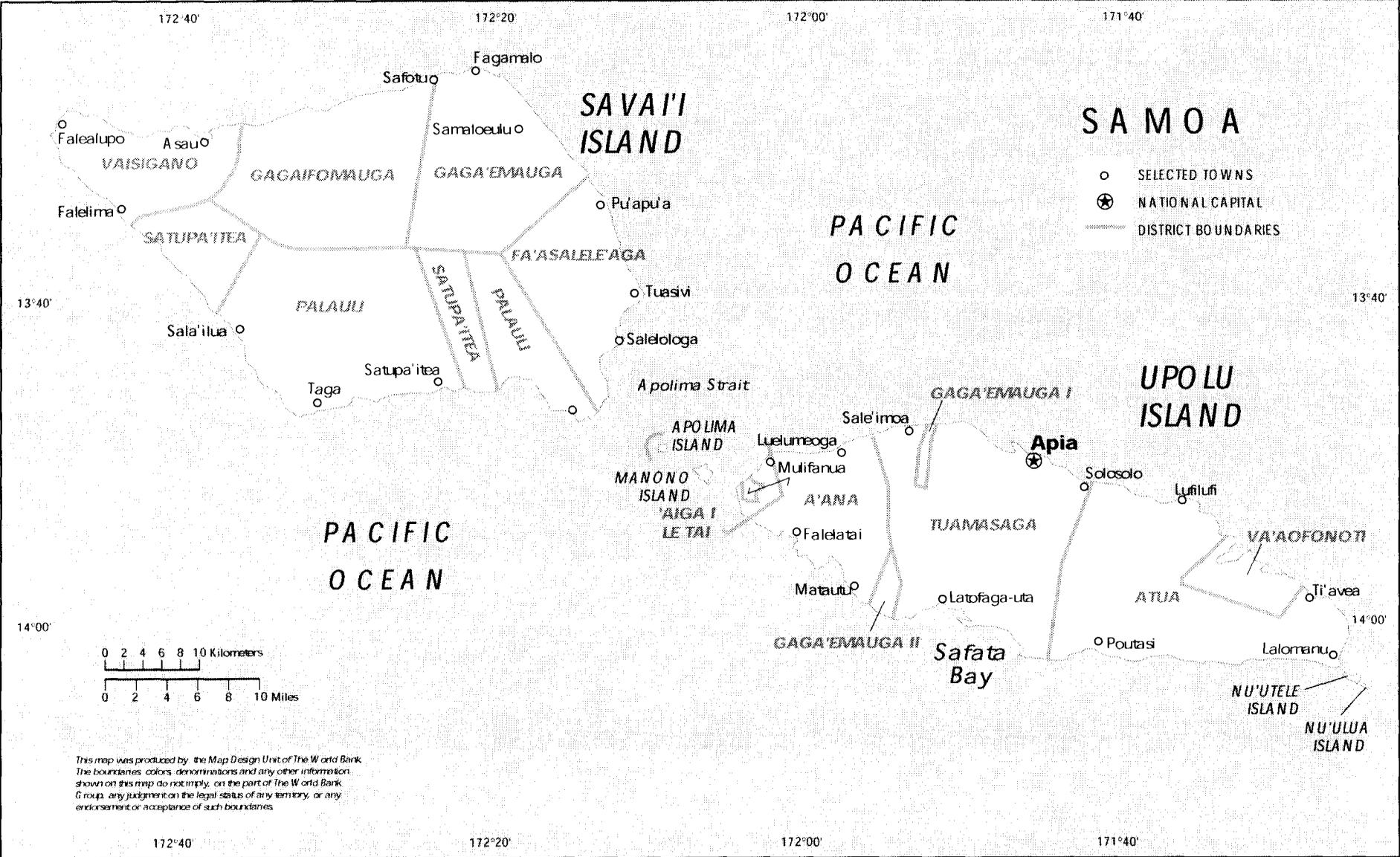
We also wanted to consider in more detail the social patterns as well as the political dimensions at work in influencing social change and to understand better how Pacific Island societies function. Who are the important players in a community or society and how do they interact formally and informally? What are the structures that define their roles and how do they manage the interface between the needs of the in-group and those of the wider society? How do different social groups define their values and set their priorities and to what degree does the articulation of traditional or customary values influence decisions about economic development and the distribution of the benefits of development? These are some of the questions we wanted to explore.

Each country study has been prepared by a consultant who has extensive familiarity with and knowledge of the social and political dimensions of that country and who could readily provide information about the culture and analysis of the issues surrounding key aspects of the society, such as leadership, decision-making and community perceptions of government and development. The studies have provided timely and valuable input into the economic and sector analyses undertaken as part of the World Bank's program in the Pacific during 1996 and 1997. I hope they will continue to be critical in informing such work in future years.

Klaus Rohland
Country Director, Pacific Islands

GLOSSARY

<i>fa'a Samoa:</i>	Samoan way of life
<i>mau:</i>	organised Samoan resistance to banning of customary practices
<i>matai:</i>	chief
<i>'aiga:</i>	a defined descent group
<i>fono:</i>	village council
<i>fa'alupega:</i>	a formal set of ceremonial greetings
<i>'aumaga:</i>	untitled males
<i>aualuma:</i>	unmarried women
<i>faletua ma tausi:</i>	women who have married into a village
<i>pisinisi:</i>	business
<i>komiti:</i>	committee



This map was produced by the Map Design Unit of The World Bank. The boundaries, colors, denominations and any other information shown on this map do not imply, on the part of The World Bank Group, any judgment on the legal status of any territory, or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to explain the social and cultural characteristics of Samoa and to outline the ways in which they affect the course of Samoa's national development. It appears as a companion to the paper on Tonga in the series (Discussion Paper No. 4); the two papers were prepared using a common conceptual framework, and readers interested in the contrasts between the two countries may wish to read both papers.

The remainder of this introduction, dealing with conceptual framework, is common to both papers.

A salient feature of the island countries of the Pacific is the large part which culture and tradition play in national life. In this they are quite distinct from Mauritius and the Caribbean countries, with which they are sometimes superficially compared. In Mauritius and the Caribbean the indigenous cultures were effectively wiped out. In the Pacific they were not. Although modified by historical and colonial experience, they have been carried through to the present, retaining control over significant national resources and exerting profound influences on national policies.

Within the Pacific, Samoa and Tonga stand out as two of the countries which were nations long before they became states - a feature which distinguishes them from Papua New Guinea and other countries of the western Pacific region, and which gives a distinctive cast to their social and political organisation.

We have sought to draw attention to these distinctive features by organising our accounts around three very general (and somewhat idiosyncratic) concepts (1) Socio-political Domains, (2) Socioeconomic Status Groupings, and (3) Traditional Enterprise.¹

SOCIO-POLITICAL DOMAINS

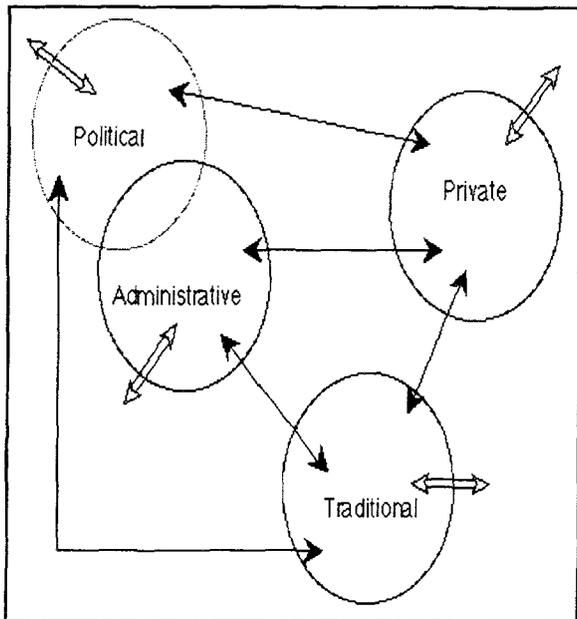
In most contemporary Pacific island countries, the people see the institutions, organisations and activities which make up their societies falling into three broad categories: government, business and the professions, and "traditional."

These divisions correspond only very roughly with those that conventional economic analyses make between public, private and traditional sectors. In calling them "domains" rather than "sectors" we draw attention to the fact that, in local terms, they connote more than macroeconomic categories. They are seen as distinct "ways of life," each with its own characteristic norms, values and culture.

In some respects they may be regarded as distinct ideologies, particularly since they overlap and conflict one with another in many concrete social and political contexts. Ambiguities of this kind are very characteristic of both Samoa and Tonga (as well as Fiji) where traditional ideas of rank permeate notions of political authority. Many of the same ambiguities are present in other Pacific island countries and, to some degree, in all small-scale societies.

We have not, however, labelled them as “ideologies,” to avoid the possibility of them being regarded as “mere ideologies,” and dismissed on those grounds. In Samoa and Tonga each “domain” has a powerful and significant material base as well as its set of morally persuasive grounding ideas.

These socio-political domains are represented in the Figure 1, below, which draws particular attention to the ways in which they are articulated one with another. The connections between the domains are of prime importance, since it is they that give each country its distinctive socio-political profile.²



For example, in a country where traditional statuses such as “chief” are gained by achievement, wealth acquired from business or professional activities may be readily rewarded by a traditional “chiefship” and, from there, converted into national political office. By contrast, in a country where the “chiefs” are strictly hereditary and occupy the highest

national political offices, both the administrative domain and business and professional activities may be shaped into a different pattern. The three domains are present in both countries, but they are articulated in different ways. Such differences can have a profound influence on the course of national economic development in different countries.

This may seem to be obvious enough. Yet it does contradict the commonly-expressed view about the necessity of a “transition” from “subsistence” to “dynamic monetary economies.” In Pacific societies such as Samoa and Tonga it is not a matter of a “modern” sector (which many would take to be the public and private sectors) opposed to an atavistic, unchanging traditional sector which can be seen as creating barriers to modernisation and development. In both countries, money and purchased goods have been used in traditional exchanges for a hundred years or so; the different sectors/domains have existed for generations, having been laid one over the other in the form of a palimpsest, each influencing what was there before and, in turn, acquiring a particular coloration of its own from what preceded it.

Matters are thus historical and contingent. This, however, is in the very nature of the social, political and cultural facts which shape the course of economic development.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Cross-cutting the domains, there are well-recognised socioeconomic status groupings. Again there are differences between Samoa and Tonga, but the general structure is the same in both, with four levels.

- Those who derive their livelihoods in the main from land resources held according to customary tenure, remittances, ceremonial distributions and perhaps casual wage employment.
- Manual wage-labourers and those in unskilled or semiskilled employment, mainly in the towns.
- A group distinguished by their levels of formal education and employment in upper managerial and professional positions.
- A relatively small but influential power elite.

The tension between these four status groupings provides much of the socio-political dynamic which “makes things happen” (or, indeed, not happen) in the drive for better national amenities and higher standards of living.

TRADITIONAL ENTERPRISE

By “traditional enterprise” we mean the activities and undertakings that are characteristic of the Traditional Domain, and which stand in contrast to those which are more generally understood as “private” and “public” enterprise. Private enterprise may be roughly defined in terms such as the following: *economic activities carried on with the expectation of profit by private individuals, acting either as individual entrepreneurs, or through partnerships associations, joint-stock companies or corporations.* By contrast, traditional enterprise may be defined as: *economic activities undertaken in support of the material well-being, reputation and social standing of extended families, churches, villages and chiefs.*

Such activities are well-known throughout the Pacific, although they are commonly portrayed in negative terms and dismissed as obstacles to

economic development and the rational use of resources.

Be that as it may, such wholly negative views obscure several points which are important in the overall development process in Pacific island countries:

- In the first place, they overlook the resources of initiative, drive and organisational capacity which are manifest in many traditional enterprises. The enterprise may serve traditional rather than commercial ends, but the means employed involve often large amounts of money and, increasingly, economically rational calculation in the use of it. Private sector development in the Pacific islands is not impeded by any “lack of enterprise” (ultimately, an argument at the psychological level) but by the economic and moral salience of the traditional domains.
- Secondly, most traditional enterprises, by their very nature, serve the cause of social integration, greatly reducing the need for what might otherwise be considerable outlays for welfare, policing and local administration and services. Ceremonials of one sort or another, even when they are tinged with rivalrous elements, in fact generate much of the social solidarity which they are designed to display.
- Thirdly, traditional values, institutions and modes of action are not simply local matters, beyond the purview of central government institutions. They are there in the constitutions and at the heart of national political life in both Samoa and Tonga. Thus recommendations for some courses of economic development may be not only difficult to implement; they may be impossible. Examples of this are in this paper.

NOTES

¹ We developed the notion of “traditional enterprise” (as a deliberate contrast to that of “private enterprise”) in a study of aid for private sector development in Western Samoa and Tonga for the Development Cooperation Division of the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. A much fuller account of traditional enterprise is given in that study, to be published by the Ministry.

² An earlier and somewhat fuller exposition of these ideas is given in Hooper 1993.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Effective European contact with Samoa began in the closing decades of the late eighteenth century, through whalers, traders and beachcombers. The islands were missionised during the 1830s and 1840s by both Protestants and Catholics, who brought about many fundamental changes and firmly established Christianity as one of the foundations of what is now known as *fa'a Samoa* or the "Samoa way of life."

Although there was common language and a common body of custom throughout the group, Samoa never had a unified polity in the sense of a centralised executive and administrative authority. During the nineteenth century, British, American and German colonial interests acquired considerable areas of plantation land and drew Samoans into various factional disputes over the establishment of a unified "kingship." By diplomatic agreement, Samoa was partitioned in 1899 between the United States, which took over the smaller eastern islands, and Germany, which established direct colonial rule over what is now Samoa.

The German regime lasted until 1914, when it was superseded by a New Zealand military administration, and Samoa became a League of Nations mandated territory under New Zealand in 1920. The extensive German plantations were

confiscated and run as the NZ Reparation Estates. In general New Zealand followed closely the German policy of direct rule, leaving local administration in the hands of village chiefly authorities. However, moves to ban certain Samoan customary practices and introduce changes in land tenure led to organised Samoan resistance known as the *Mau*, and, eventually, armed intervention from New Zealand in the late 1920s. The breach between the two countries did not begin to be healed until the mid-1930s.

Following the Second World War, New Zealand assumed a UN trusteeship over Samoa and began to cooperate in preparations for the country's self-government. In 1962, Samoa became an independent state, with a constitution firmly "based on Christian principles and Samoan customs and traditions."

Idiosyncratic as the constitution is (in its juxtaposition of traditional authority with the rational-bureaucratic principles of a modern state) it expressed the received Samoan wisdom of the time about the true basis of national independence after long experience of colonial rule. Today, after 35 years of independence, the contradictions inherent in the constitution are still being played out.

THE TRADITIONAL DOMAIN

For both ideological and substantial material reasons, the traditional domain is the foundation of modern Samoan social and political life. Historically, it is the oldest of the domains, and although much modified to fit in with current circumstances, it shows many continuities with the past and is regarded by most Samoans as a vital source of national stability.

It is the location and source of the chiefly *matai* system which controls all local government and reaches into the highest levels of national political life. The *matai* system is the overarching and dominant institution of the traditional domain. Over 80 percent of the land is under traditional *matai* control, providing the major source of livelihood for some 67 percent of the economically active population, and approximately 50 percent of GDP.

THE "MATAI SYSTEM"

A *matai* is basically a title which is owned and at the disposal of a defined descent group known as an *'aiga*. Succession to a title is by election within the *'aiga*. The great majority of *matai* are male; of the 20,000 or so registered titles in 1990, only 994 were held by women. Usually, but not universally, a person elected to a title is a member of the *'aiga* concerned and has a claim to the title through a record of previous service to the group. As the Samoan saying goes, "The road to power and authority is through service."

It is at the local, village level that the operation of the *matai* system is most clearly understood. There are some 300 villages in Samoa (the exact

number depending on whether one counts what are in some respects "sub-villages" as being effectively independent villages). Each village is made up of the local members of a number of *'aiga*, usually between 20 and 40, with each *'aiga* headed by a *matai* who is effectively the head of the family, managing its lands and house-sites, allocating labour and other resources, and representing the group in the village council, or *fono*.

Larger *'aiga* may have several *matai* titles at their disposal, in which case the senior-ranking *matai* may delegate some responsibilities to those of lesser rank. The *'aiga* are commensal units, pooling resources of both cash and food for allocation by the *matai* according to individual needs - for sustenance, clothing, school fees and the like, as well as for contributions made in the name of the *'aiga* to village-directed enterprises, the church, and the host of ceremonial activities such as weddings, title-bestowals and funerals which make up the fabric of traditional village life.

Matai titles are of two main kinds: the "high chief" titles, which have an aura of sanctity and respectful silence, and "orator" titles, associated with argumentation and active political manipulation. Some titles, however, are of both kinds. In any case, the distinction is of little import in everyday *'aiga* affairs.

In a very real sense, each village is an independent principality,¹ whose uniqueness and internal structure is proclaimed in a formal

set of ceremonial greetings known as its *fa'alupega*. The village is governed by its *fono* or *matai* council, which has wide-ranging powers for the maintenance of order and the provision and upkeep of village facilities such as schools and health clinics. The *matai* titles of a village are ranked in a hierarchy of importance and power, which also implies that the families "owning" the titles are also ranked in relation to one another. Nonetheless, at village council meetings every *matai* has a chance to speak, and decisions are reached by consensus.

Proceedings at village *matai* council meetings are hedged about with elaborate social and political etiquette; much attention is paid to oratorical skills, and the best speakers (who are also frequently the most persuasive and powerful) can bring together in one seamless web legend, Biblical allusions, homely saws and village affairs in the esoteric language of chiefs. Those who do not have this facility (most usually younger men with junior titles) often choose not to speak at all, though they are free to attend the *matai* council meetings. There are, in effect, "real" *matai* and "little" *matai* in each council. The distinction has been around for a long time, though it has assumed a greater salience over the past two decades with the proliferation of titles and the "splitting" of many of them among a number of incumbents. The import of this is explained in greater detail below.

There are also a number of high-ranking titles which are at the disposal, not of localised *'aiga*, but groups of orators from the dozen or so traditional "districts" into which Samoa is divided. The titles are largely honorific (having no direct connections with the administration of land and other material resources) but they

are by no means insignificant for that reason. Indeed, they carry enormous weight, influence and prestige within their districts, and some of them are of wider significance, not only within the traditional sphere but also on the wider national scene.

Exact parallels are difficult to find, especially in Western contexts, but the positions are not dissimilar to those in the more exclusive orders of knighthood in Britain and some Commonwealth countries; or, in academic circles, the presidencies of learned bodies of one sort or another. In Samoa, as in other places, such titles are not "merely honorific." Many regard them as the summit of their ambitions.

Within this category of high-ranking titles there are four supreme ones, sometimes known collectively in English as the "royal sons," who are eligible for more or less automatic appointment to the Chamber of Deputies. The current Head of State has one of these four titles; the incumbents of another two titles are in the Chamber of Deputies, while the man holding the fourth title has chosen to remain as leader of the parliamentary opposition.

THE LAND AND TITLES COURT

Although it was instituted by the German colonial administration and has a history going back no further than the beginning of this century, the Land and Titles Court (like Christianity) is one of the fundamental institutions of the Traditional domain of Samoan social and political life. It has been described as "a neo-traditional bulwark of Samoan custom, and...is now regarded as a mechanism integral to the maintenance of chiefship."² The origins of the Court lie in the 1889 Berlin

Treaty's prohibition of the sale of the customary land outside the boundaries of Apia and the establishment of a Land Commission to investigate claims. The Land and Titles Court established by the colonial regime in 1903 continued the earlier policy regarding the alienation of Samoan land, and also took on responsibility for adjudicating rival Samoan claims to land and *matai* titles.

The later New Zealand administration also endorsed the prohibitions on the alienation of customary land, and the 1962 constitution laid the legal foundation for the present situation whereby customary land is held "...in accordance with Samoan custom and usage and the law relating to Samoan custom and usage." The currently relevant law is the Land and Titles Court Act of 1981, which provides that "in all matters brought before it, the court shall apply (a) customs and usage, (b) the law relating to customs and usage."

There is, however, no body of written law or even a body of legal opinions relating to customary land and titles. The court's jurisdiction is exercised by a president and at least two Samoan judges and two Samoan assessors; no less than four members are on the bench for any court hearing. Legal representation is not allowed in the court (though lawyers do help prepare major cases), and court decisions are not reviewable by any other court. There are no written codes or statutes to guide the court's deliberations, nor are there written or oral opinions which might constitute a body of legal precedent. Each case is decided "on its own merits," having regard to both general opinion and acceptable local

variations of custom. In fact, court decisions have tended to be overwhelmingly conservative.

In spite of its being "a bulwark of Samoan tradition," both the court and its predecessors embody a contradiction. Village and district *matai* councils are the logically prior determinants of what constitutes custom and tradition, and in general, whatever they decide goes. The freedom to petition the court means that effective power is taken out of the hands of these councils and is wielded by the court. The court thus has tremendous influence.

In fact the definition of Samoan custom that is accepted today can only be ascertained through the court's decisions. Some measure of its power is given by the fact that since 1912 succession to the four most senior *matai* titles in the land has been decided and confirmed by the court on each occasion that they have become vacant.

On matters more directly related to land there is now considerable evidence that on-the-ground village practices have for some time been diverging from what the court would regard as proper custom. What seems certain is that in matters of land use and occupation there has been a considerable degree of individualisation, with people also being allowed to pass on lands to their immediate children - without, however, there being any rights to dispose of the lands by sale.

No transition towards the freeholding of customary land is implied by the changes. But the matter is also confused by the process of title-splitting and the creation of new titles for voting purposes which has been going on, quite independently, at the same time as the alleged "individualisation" has been taking place.

The crucial point would seem to be the extent to which senior village *matai* allow their genealogical juniors (the “little *matai*”) these freedoms. But then that can also become arguable because of the right of any “interested Samoan” to petition the court for a ruling on such matters - and this right is being taken up at an increasing rate.

Some commentators have attributed this to the increasing degree of physical mobility and “the pace of modern life.” In earlier days, when funerals and other ceremonies took place, bringing scattered *'aiga* members together, they could sit and debate for days, or for as long as it took to work out consensus decisions on important matters. Nowadays, as one man put it, “We all have jobs and can’t afford the time. So what we do is go for one day, give our contributions and show our faces, and then take off again.”

All of this has been putting an unbearable load on the Land and Titles Court, which now has a backlog of cases which would take years to clear. At least two cabinet committees have considered the matter in recent years, but without definite action being taken. The matter is indeed a complicated one, impinging on the central contradictions between custom and law which lie at the heart of much of Samoan public life. Added to the difficulty, there is apparently the matter of an antiquated system of court records, a source of some frustration for Samoans with legal training, or simply tidy minds.

THE STABILITY OF THE MATAI SYSTEM

The brief account given above may give an impression of fixity and the people’s unthinking adherence to a dead weight of tradition. This is

far from being the truth. While it is true that the system has much to do with the orderliness and calm which pervades village life, this conceals both the tensions that are inherent in the system itself and the changes which are continuously being wrought by outside influences.

The inherent tensions spring from the fact that succession to *matai* titles is by election rather than any fixed mode of inheritance. The different branches of an *'aiga* often give unyielding support to their own candidates, arguing for their suitability on a variety of diverse yet wholly “traditional” grounds. There are various ways of solving this dilemma, the most common being a prior agreement within the group that the title should rotate among the branches; titles are also frequently split among two or more individuals for this same reason. But conflicts are not always settled amicably.

Other tensions spring from the fact that the hierarchical ranking of titles within a village or district is “inherently contestable.” The “going version” of a *fa'alupega* might not be the only one arguable on traditional grounds, and the balance between *'aiga* and among groups of *'aiga* can change over time by the adroit manipulation of political power.

Again, the status of a title within the rank hierarchy has to be continually reaffirmed by the effectiveness of the titleholder, and this means keeping up a generous flow of contributions to the church, to village enterprises and the exchanges made at weddings, funerals and other celebrations.

Family and *'aiga* loyalties are intense, and the rivalry between *'aiga* is unremitting - not least because all such contributions are recorded and widely publicised. These uncertainties and

ambiguities mean that the power of a *matai* is seldom absolutely secure.

The greatest external influence for changes in the *matai* system has come, perhaps paradoxically, from within Samoa itself. Under the Electoral Act of 1963, only *matai* could stand for parliamentary election, and only *matai* were enfranchised. But while this was clearly in accord with the Constitution being based on "...Samoan custom and tradition," it did not anticipate the extent to which custom and tradition, and even the *matai* system itself, could be adapted to serve intervillage rivalries and individual political ambitions. If only *matai* could vote in national elections, then it was clear that a village with more *matai* than another in a two-village constituency would have a better chance of getting its candidate into parliament; and similarly, a candidate who could get the most *matai* obligated to him, would stand a better chance of election.

The solution was simply to create more titles, or split existing titles between a number of incumbents. Many villages took this up with enthusiasm, and while the population increase between 1960 and 1972 was about 34 percent, the number of registered *matai* increased by 89 percent. Another calculation showed that while *matai* made up 3.9 percent of the population in 1961, the corresponding proportion in 1979 was 7.2 percent.

In extreme examples, titles were even given to minors, with the new ones sometimes having frivolous names; existing titles were also split among as many as 60 incumbents. Both these methods of increasing *matai* numbers were in accord with tradition and had been practised for many years - but on a much more modest scale,

and mainly to allow for population increase and the increasing diversity of local interests.

The new developments created considerable national concern about the debasement of the whole *matai* system. But in spite of a 1969 amendment which allowed the Land and Titles Court to remove over 2000 people from the national register of *matai* because their titles had not been conferred in accordance with custom, the process continued. During the 1970s one village created 200 *matai* in one day, and 400 the next.

A parliamentary committee of enquiry in the late 1970s heard many diverse points of view on the problem (including a proposal for the abolition of elections altogether in favour of districts deciding on their parliamentarians by "consensus") but came to the conclusion that universal suffrage should be introduced, but with only *matai* being eligible to stand for election.

Although this was an obvious solution, the national party political conflicts of the 1980s meant that matters were shelved, and it was not until 1990 that a national plebiscite was held on the issue. The result was a narrow victory for universal suffrage (19,392 for it and 17,464 against, with 2,742 informal votes) and the 1991 election was held on this basis, resulting in an increased majority for the Human Rights Protection Party.

The change has in some ways increased the usually high financial burden laid upon candidates, and there are many who still disagree with the new suffrage, fearing that it might presage a further change allowing non-*matai* to stand as candidates. And that, it is generally agreed, would be a really fundamental

change in the whole socio-political architecture of the country.

Other changes in the *matai* system have been brought about by large-scale emigration over the past generation (mostly to New Zealand, but also to Australia and the USA) and the growth of a salariat and opportunities for wage employment around the capital town of Apia. An increasing proportion of the population, then, has been shifting away from the rural areas and reliance on customary lands as the main source of their livelihood. These individuals have not, however, been lost. They have in fact elaborated the system, having been brought right into the heart of it, providing it with both money and new avenues to national power and influence.

The scale of emigration from Samoa is shown by the fact that while there were only some 6000 Samoans resident in New Zealand in 1961, by 1991 there were 86,000. Other significant emigrant populations are now located in American Samoa (where 9,000 of the 1985 population had been born in Samoa), the United States and more recently, Australia, which in 1994 had nearly 6000 people born in Samoa. It is this emigration which has kept the national population growth rate low (only 0.5 percent annually between 1986 and 1991) in spite of a crude birth rate over the same period in excess of 30 per thousand.

The emigrants are of very direct economic significance to the country, since they are currently sending back almost WSS100 million annually as remittances. The great bulk of the remittances are sent to close kin such as parents and siblings, but through them a proportion also flows through as contributions to wider *'aiga* collections for contributions to village, church

and kin ceremonies, and thus directly affects the relative standing of *'aiga* and its *matai*.

A number of aspects of Samoan custom continue to thrive among the emigrant communities, and the use of *matai* titles in community affairs is common. Moreover, *matai* who emigrate maintain an interest in the affairs of their *'aiga* and villages and send money home as part of the obligations associated with their titles.

Mindful of this pattern, *'aiga* often willingly grant titles to emigrants who may request them, especially if they have been diligent in sending remittances and keeping up contacts with home. The granting of titles to *'aiga* members resident outside their villages is in fact an old practice, and there have always been some people who have held titles from more than one village.

In the case of emigrants overseas, however, the practice has very clear material advantages for those in the home villages. And for their part, emigrants frequently see a title as an assurance of their continuing place within the system; even if there is little likelihood of them ever returning permanently themselves, there is always a possibility that at least some of their children might wish to.

For similar reasons, titles are also fairly generously granted by their home *'aiga* and villages to people who live mainly from their salaried occupations and professions in Apia. Indeed, such people are frequently sought out by *'aiga* with which they have only distant connections - and, as is often pointed out, the more important and influential their positions are, the more they are assiduously sought.

This "extension" of the *matai* system from its rural base into other socio-political domains is one of the strongest factors making for the

overall integration of Samoan society, and is dealt with in more detail below.

Some idea of the extent to which both emigrants and urban Samoans have come to participate directly as *matai* in "the *matai* system" is given by data from two villages:³

Village A, on Upolu, had a population of 135 in 1965 and 10 *matai*, 5 of whom were resident in the village and 5 in Apia. By 1980, the population had dropped to 95, but there were 20 *matai*, only 7 of whom were resident, with 11 in Apia and 2 overseas.

Village B, on Savaii, had a population of 176 in 1965 and 15 *matai*, 14 of whom were resident in the village and 1 in Apia. By 1980, the population had grown to 206 and there were 42 *matai*, 26 resident in the village, and a further 16 resident in Apia or overseas.

VILLAGE INSTITUTIONS

All aspects of village life are regulated by the *matai* council, from dress (long hair for men and immodesty in women's clothes are banned in most villages) to church attendance and the keeping of a nightly curfew on movements of people. Individual offenders are expected to be disciplined by their *matai*, but if a whole *'aiga* should defy the general will of the *fono*, it may be fined with a levy of food or money, by destruction of its crops and buildings, by banishment or even, as has happened in a number of cases in the recent past, by murder.

Local "customs and traditions" do indeed give the local councils very wide authority, as can be illustrated by a number of contemporary examples.⁴

- The banishment of a local man who campaigned openly for a parliamentary candidate other than the one agreed upon by the village council.
- A family which allowed itself to be transported to the poll by the Opposition candidate (not the candidate agreed upon by the *matai* council) was fined in pigs and taro, and when they failed to produce the exact amount, they were expelled from the village.

In its internal structure, each village follows a common pattern, with roles and activities defined by status and gender. Untitled males together make up the *'aumaga*, working together on village projects under the direction of the council and acting in attendance at its meetings. It is through such attendance that younger men have a chance to learn the politics of village affairs and the groundwork of proper *matai* conduct.

Particularly in village ceremonial affairs there is a clear conceptual distinction made between the unmarried women (usually young and born in the village) who together make up the *au'aluma*, and those who have married in, who are collectively known as *faletua ma taus*. As "sisters" to the men of the village, the *au'aluma* has some status and precedence, as shown by the part which they may play in the kava presentations which mark formal intervillage gatherings. The in-marrying "wives" have a much lesser formal status on such occasions, the general expectation being that they are subservient to their husbands.⁵

Both categories of women are joined together, however, in the village "Women's Committee," which is run by its own council, with each woman filling a ranked position according to

the rank of her husband. Public duties performed by the Committees include the inspection of houses for cleanliness and sanitation, assisting at the village clinic and cleaning churches and their grounds. Since most of women's routine work ties them closely to their homes, Committee activities provide welcome occasions for wider social gatherings, amusements and cooperation in the routine drudgery of mat-weaving.

THE CHURCHES IN THE TRADITIONAL DOMAIN

Conversion to Christianity in the nineteenth century brought about many fundamental changes in Samoan life and ideas, but the church itself was also very quickly adapted to the *matai* system. Villages became congregations through a "covenant" (a translation of the Samoan term and of direct Biblical derivation) dividing local governance between the secular realm controlled by the *matai* councils, and the religious realm, controlled by resident pastors. The arrangement persists in every Samoan village to this day, and is regarded as being wholly traditional.

Pastors are highly honoured and respected, but the formal relationship between a pastor and a village sets the pastor apart from other leaders. He has authority over church affairs but no formal say in the secular affairs of the village. It is part of the "covenant" that pastors may not take *matai* titles, and in both the Congregational and Methodist churches, neither a pastor nor his wife should have any close relatives in the villages where they serve. The pastor also should not participate as an individual in local family affairs or village ceremonies; he may give the

opening prayer, but should leave immediately after that.

Pastors are "called" by village congregations, which supply him and his family with a house, gifts of food, a money income, lands for planting, and domestic servants. The pastor, together with local deacons, directs the affairs of the church. His monetary income comes from regular donations made in the name of *matai* of the congregation, in the church. These donations are then publicly announced, in exactly the same way that donations are announced in other village contexts. There is thus a very strong element of competition between the various 'aiga of a congregation, the outcome of which can affect the general standing of an 'aiga in both church and village.

In well-off villages, pastors receive substantial incomes, well over \$20,000 annually in many cases, and can afford cars and overseas education for their children. Villagers may have strong reservations about particular pastors and about the earthly ways of the church, but these are rarely expressed publicly. In extreme cases, whole congregations have been known to withdraw their support from particular pastors, making their continuing presence untenable. Failing this sort of unanimity, though, people are always free to change their religious affiliation. This is also a strategy which is not lightly done, and usually signals some sort of inter-'aiga conflict in the wider village scene.

Church loyalties are strong, but religious factionalism is generally muted in the villages. Most people do not mind what a person's particular faith may be - so long as it is Christian (and preferably one of the long-established churches) and proper Christian behaviour such

as church attendance is maintained. Church edicts permeate a lot of village life, in some cases forbidding all gambling, dancing and alcohol, and all the Christian churches forbid both work and games on Sundays. Other minority churches usually conform to these conventions for the sake of local harmony. A further feature of village life is an evening curfew, enforced by the *matai* council, which draws every family back to its home for evening prayers and restricts movement about the village during hours of darkness.

Besides supporting a pastor and his family, congregations also build and maintain their own churches and other facilities such as meeting halls. Churches are the largest, most elaborate and imposing structures in the rural areas, and building one is very expensive undertaking, in spite of the unpaid labour that is involved. All churches are built of imported materials. Funds are raised through special levies on the *matai* of a congregation, including those established overseas, and through organised parties travelling to the migrant communities in New Zealand and elsewhere, giving entertainments and fine mats in exchange for monetary contributions.

In spite of these efforts, almost all new churches are opened with a substantial burden of debt - the loans which are not available for other traditional ventures being generally allowed for churches, largely because of good repayment records. The key to repayment is the ceremonial church opening ceremonies, which ordinarily draw huge crowds of kin, the village as a whole and church members from other villages, all bearing contributions. These occasions are rivalled in size and importance only by ceremonies for the highest chiefs in the country.

Samoa is frequently criticised for the amount of money and resources that is spent on village churches. They are seen, however, as tangible expressions of the loyalty and devotion of their congregations, the general standing of villages, and the importance of religion generally throughout the country. Whether their construction diverts labour and resources from more productive enterprises is, however, a moot point. Many Samoans argue that this is the case, though they can rarely specify exactly what other enterprises might be more productive in village contexts.

Labour is short in the traditional sector, mainly because of emigration, and agricultural commodities command low prices. A survey done in a Savaii village in the early 1980s showed that those families which were dependent mainly on agriculture for their livelihoods spent only about 7 percent of their incomes on church donations of all kinds.⁶

MONEY AND LIVELIHOOD IN THE TRADITIONAL DOMAIN

In much of the Pacific development literature, the term "traditional" is commonly used to refer to agricultural activities on land held according to customary tenure, and is often conflated with "subsistence economy." Samoa has never been a "subsistence economy" if that term connotes "mere subsistence" or the direction of all economic activity towards the simple goal of obtaining enough to satisfy the primary needs for food and shelter. In pre-European times Samoa had many specialised occupations, many goods and services not directed toward primary needs, and a marked degree of social stratification.

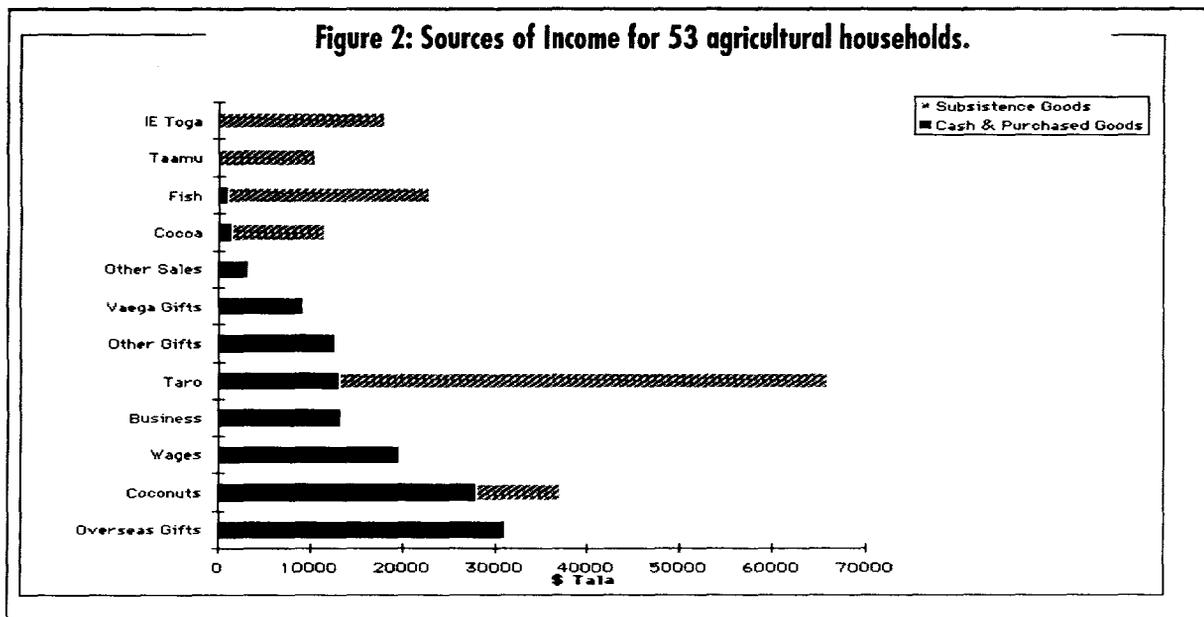
Today, within the heartland of Samoa's traditional domain, the rural villages set on customary lands, cash is of prime importance to people's livelihoods. The extent to which this is so can be inferred to some extent from national economic statistics, but a much clearer picture can be gained from the very few detailed surveys which are available.

One such survey from a "strongly agricultural" rural village on Savaii in the early 1980s⁷ showed that the total income of the 53 "farm households" (i.e. excluding the households of the schoolteacher and the local trader) in the village was divided roughly equally between cash and subsistence incomes. The monetary value of the subsistence items consumed was computed in the usual way from "average market prices," even though these markets were imperfect, or, for some items, virtually nonexistent. The subsistence goods produced by the households included coconuts, taro, cocoa,

fish, taamu and fine mats. 71 percent of the coconuts were sold for cash, 22 percent of the taro and 10 percent of the cocoa; the amount of other items sold was insignificant.

The overall results of this survey are shown in Figure 2 below. Undoubtedly one of its most striking features is the fact that some 26 percent of the households' monetary incomes came from remittances and gifts from relatives living overseas. The wages component came from employment by the two nonfarm households in the village, and the business component from three farm households which ran very small business ventures on the side.

The "gifts" components, which together make up 17 percent of total monetary income were made up of cash and purchased goods received in public ceremonies. (These "purchased goods" were undoubtedly cases of canned herring, cabin biscuits and canned corned beef, all of which are now essential components of the exchanges



which are part of marriage, funeral and other ceremonies.)

The largest source of monetary income, "overseas gifts," is at the bottom. Other sources of income appear above it. The solid portion of the bars represents the amount of monetary income from each source. The hatched portion of each bar represents the value of subsistence items consumed directly by the households.

Two final points about Figure 2 should perhaps be added here. First, the exchange rate at the time of the survey was WS\$1 = US\$0.86 and is now WS\$1 = US\$0.41. Second, the average annual per capita income for the two nonfarm households in the village at the time of the survey was roughly 4 times that of the farm households.

It should also be noted that the survey was made in a cash-poor rural district, well beyond commuting range of Apia with its concentration of employment opportunities in both the private and public sectors. In the peri-urban villages of the northwest coast of Upolu, as well as in Apia itself, the average per-capita incomes would undoubtedly have been higher, and derived in different proportions from the various sources. Today, the imbalance would doubtless be even greater, though there are no data to demonstrate this directly.

GIFTS AND CEREMONIAL EXCHANGES

One of the most distinctive features of Samoan life is the number of ceremonial occasions calling for large gatherings with oratorical displays and stylised exchanges of goods and money. These are weddings, funerals, church dedications, farewells, returns and title-bestowals, as well as various more arcane

occasions concerning the *matai* system at its higher levels. All are kin and village based and thus involve the *matai* system; and they are all doubtless of traditional origin, although people from all walks of life contribute and participate.

Both men and women are involved, with the exchange goods being gendered into two categories of *toga* (mainly fine mats, but also cloth and oils) and *'oloa* (nowadays pigs, taro, kava, cash and purchased items such as salt beef, canned herrings, and biscuits). The exchange goods of each side are gathered together from *'aiga* and household sources according to set levies, with all contributions recorded.

The two sides meet, orators vying with one another over matters of precedence, the gifts and counter-gifts are presented (again with everything being recorded, by both sides) and redistributions finally made by each side among its *'aiga* and households. Although stylised and formal, such ceremonies are not stodgy. They are crowded performances, at operatic scale, full of movement, dancing, competition and humour. Every speech, gift and counter-gift is assayed for its meanings and (often deliberate) ambiguities.

They require enormous cooperative efforts by each side in order to demonstrate its social solidarity - and, in the way of such enterprises, they in fact *generate* in the process much of the solidarity that they are designed to display. They gather together, in fact, much of what Samoan life is all about.

They also have very obvious economic entailments, if only because they demand money - not just for the gifts but for the whole infrastructure of transport, shelter and provisioning that is needed to carry them off.

But it is not simply money which is involved. Rank also enters the picture, according to the principle that those of high rank should both give *and receive* larger gifts from those of lower rank.⁸ A further principle is that wealthy people should give larger gifts than others.

Ideally, rank and wealth go together, since both depend on the number of supporters that a person or family can command. In this way, wealthy people who have incomes from businesses and professions (and don't necessarily have many supporters) can gain supporters, and so translate their money into rank. Thus the *matai* system can be extended into the business world of Apia as well as into the migrant communities in other countries.

ENTREPRENEURS IN THE TRADITIONAL DOMAIN

Pisinisi, the Samoan word for "business," has been an established part of most villages since at least the beginning of this century. Probably the first kind to be established were retail stores, which also acted as buyers of copra for larger urban interests. They are still common, but have been joined in more recent years by bus operators, taxis, and now, small "beach-house" enterprises aimed at younger travellers and the lower-priced end of the tourist market.

There are also a number of men using their own customary lands for more than the usual incidental cash-cropping, fencing it and stocking with cattle or planting cocoa and kava, sometimes with hired labour. Most of these men are *matai* and have reached amicable arrangements within their *'aiga* for more or less exclusive use of sufficient lands for their enterprises.

Pisinisi carries prestige, marking a person off from other villagers, who are generally pleased to make use of the services provided. Credit may be an ever-present risk, but successful business people always extend it and learn how to manage and make good use of it to enlarge their enterprises. And since most village entrepreneurs are basically in business to make themselves into better Samoans rather than to escape being Samoan, they give generously to village enterprises, ensuring further local loyalties and support. Such success can be readily converted into worthwhile *matai* titles. Many village-based business people are, however, satisfied with titles of only moderate rank which are not too demanding of their time.

The long-term ambition of such businessmen is to become a member of parliament for their district, cashing in the obligations, loyalties and trust they have built up over the years. The most striking example of this is Vaai Kolone, who rose to be Prime Minister in the 1980s and now has a seat in the Chamber of Deputies. He accomplished this promotion by single-minded determination, by paying all members of his *'aiga*, by clearing new unused village lands and planting cash crops with outside labour. He stretched custom to its limit, but he never flouted it, and he retained the support of his fellow village *matai* throughout.

This is an unusual case, but it is frequently cited by Samoans as an illustration of the *flexibility* of the *matai* system. This is an important point. There is indeed a good deal of variation and flexibility within the system and it can be bent and adapted to all sorts of new circumstances. The adaptations must, however, have general consent at the village level - which means carrying other *matai* along.

This particular man's career is also interesting from another angle - which is that he put great emphasis on educating his children, who are now nearly all in business, professions and government service, and in Samoa rather than overseas. In only two generations the family has in fact changed its socioeconomic status dramatically and now runs right through from village to the power elite. But it is mainly the speed, determination and intelligence with which this has all been accomplished that is unusual. It is all part of widespread process that can be illustrated, to lesser degrees, from many 'aiga

"RIVALROUS COMMUNALISM"

This example of Vaai Kolone draws attention to the rivalry and competition which, as many observers have commented, lies behind the ideology of staid, peaceful communalism. Samoans know it well, though most are reluctant to articulate it in print or any public setting. The following characterisation by a leading Samoan writer sums it up very directly and forcefully:

This negative trait is not surprising when we look at what we actually do to one another within our 'aiga, villages, churches, places of work, and Parliament. We want to project the image of a communal society at peace, in which we love one another and share everything equally. The reality is sometimes frightening. Rivalry and competition within our 'aiga and between our 'aiga are rife and often vicious and unforgiving. Competing for matai titles, we war with the blood relatives we supposedly love, even take them to court, and parade their questionable lineages. Within a village, 'aiga compete constantly for social, political and economic advantage. Nationally, the war

continues between rival 'aiga and factions. With our smiling, gentlemanly public masks strapped on firmly, we deliver the vicious innuendo and rumour, the gentlemanly back stab and swipe, the poetic kick to the vitals. Sometimes we even kill someone and then plead with the Judge to hang us because we have disgraced the good name of our 'aiga.

This never-ending rivalry, motivated, to a great extent, by envy, continues to ensure the survival of a fairly egalitarian system in which no one 'aiga or group or person is too highly stasured or rich enough not to be cut down to size and sometimes dug under.⁹

This perspective throws light on both the underlying dynamic of tradition and its pervasive influence on many aspects of Samoan life. In particular, it can be called on to account in some measure for the extraordinary amount of remittances which are received from emigrants. People overseas send money not simply because they love their kin (though many do) but also to keep up the status of their kin (and thus their own status).

Again, villages and 'aiga have gone to great lengths to increase the number of *matai* simply because other villages and other 'aiga were doing so, to gain electoral advantage. They knew that, on the ground (where it really mattered) the low-status "ballot *matai*" could not detract from the status and power of the "proper" and more senior *matai* - however much anguish they might have caused the Land and Titles Court.

THE MATAI MYSTIQUE

Although there is an extensive anthropological literature on the *matai* system, it covers only a small portion of the myth, tradition, history and

genealogical knowledge on which it is based - and which is the foundation of its finesse, decorum and conflicts. There are also good accounts by linguists of the subtleties of Samoan formal discourse.

None of this is directly relevant here. What is relevant, however, is the effort which many individuals put into learning it. Professionals returning to Samoa after extensive periods of overseas education, and business people brought up in the urban environment of Apia frequently have to put themselves through a crash-course in *fa'a Samoa* if they aspire to any place in public life. What they seek to learn are all the matters of both substance and style which are absorbed "naturally" by those brought up in village contexts, through *tautua* or service as juniors listening to the deliberations of older people.

Time and again I have been told by Samoans that "you can always tell instantly" when somebody does not really know the speech protocols and is merely faking. This is shaming - to the extent that many people with titles never make a formal speech in a meeting.

There are in Apia a number of loosely-connected networks of younger New Zealand-educated Samoans in salaried jobs, who live largely outside the influences of the *matai* system, contributing only very reluctantly, if at all, to *'aiga* occasions, and avoiding the church. These are the "yuppies," recognised as such by older educated Samoans who have been through the same stage themselves before they too took titles and joined the system. There are indeed ageing hippies in Samoa, as there are elsewhere, but, again, as in other places, no ageing yuppies.

SUICIDE

Reference to this topic is appropriate here because the "epidemic" of youth suicides which began in Samoa during the 1970s and continued throughout the 1980s, has been attributed by some to be due, in part at least, to the oppressive and authoritarian nature of the *matai* system. The high incidence of suicide among males aged between 15-34 years was first brought to public attention by journalists, and has since been the subject of both local concern and informed academic scrutiny. The rate for males in this age-group during the 1980s was indeed one of the highest in the world.

The explanation for it has been convincingly held to lie in the raised expectations of youth, brought about through education, television and movies, and frustrated by blocked opportunities for social advancement and personal freedom (through emigration or wage-labour) for young males.¹⁰ Faced with the traditional and gerontocratic *matai* system, many youths then took their own lives. This explanation draws support from the observations of many outsiders over the years about the "oppressive" and "claustrophobic" nature of *matai* rule in many contexts.

SUMMARY FEATURES OF THE TRADITIONAL DOMAIN

- Its heartland lies in the 300 or so rural villages where 75 percent of the population live on lands which are, by both custom and law, inalienable. Neither the custom nor the law are likely to change in the foreseeable future.
- Some 80 percent of the land in Samoa is held under customary tenure, being divided among descent groups known as *'aiga*, each of which

is headed by a *matai* or "chief" chosen by 'aiga members. Councils of village *matai* control village affairs and local government.

- The "*matai* system" lies at the core of the Samoan sense of national identity - which is strong. Because people outside the rural villages take *matai* titles, the system extends to the government and administrative domains, as well as to business and the professions and into emigrant Samoan communities.
- Christianity is an integral part of the traditional domain - to the extent that the domain is referred to by some critics as "the *matai*-cleric coalition."
- Livelihoods are based on subsistence and cash crops, remittances and some wage labour and small business.
- Paradoxical as it may seem, the traditional *matai* system is the foundation of Samoa's largest source of overseas funds - the WS\$100M which comes in annually in the form of remittances. The money goes directly to extended families and 'aiga; it underwrites both the standard of living in the villages and the elaborate ceremonial system.
- The *matai* system has undergone many changes and adaptations over the past 30 years. Villagers avidly seek money for the amenities of modern life, and are not blindly resistant to innovation. The crucial point about innovations is that to be accepted they must not threaten local (i.e., *matai*) authority - whether they be proposed by the next village, the government, or indeed any outside agency

It would be difficult to overestimate the influence which the institutions of the traditional

domain have over the pattern of social and economic development in Samoa. Collectively, the 'aiga, villages, districts, the overarching *matai* system and the churches have retained an overweening economic and moral power, to which the newer national political and governmental institutions have had to accommodate. The balance of power between the traditional and public domains may be changing in favour of the public domain, but the basic pattern of Samoan development was already set almost 40 years ago when people from the traditional domain began to direct their labour and energies overseas rather than to the strategies of development defined and controlled by the national government.

NOTES

¹ The image of villages as "independent principalities" is frequently used in the literature on Samoa. It is most apt, but I am not sure who coined it. I first came across it in a publication by Penelope Schoeffel.

² O'Meara 1995:120, quoting from a 1986 publication of C.G. Powles. Powles attributed this view to "the Samoan leadership" of the time, but it is one that is still widely held by Samoans. The best studies of land tenure and of the influence of the Land and Titles Court are Meleisea 1987 and O'Meara 1990 and 1995. This section draws heavily on their work.

³ Yamamoto, 1994:183.

⁴ Taken from Lawson, 1996:157.

⁵ Schoeffel, 1995.

⁶ O'Meara, 1990: 222:10.

⁷ O'Meara, 1990: 163-192.

⁸ O'Meara, 1990: 203.

⁹ Wendt, 1981:50.

¹⁰ Macpherson and Macpherson, 1987.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

During the progressive constitutional changes leading up to independence in 1962, New Zealand, as the administering power, went along with the clear Samoan preference for maintaining the time-honoured system by which only *matai* could hold political office. The practice was authorised by electoral regulations governing the formation of Legislative Assemblies from the 1950s on.

The issue of suffrage was raised in debates over the draft constitution in 1960, but a move to include universal suffrage in the document was clearly defeated. As a result, suffrage was not covered in the constitution adopted by the Constitutional Convention later in the year, and which was later ratified by a UN plebiscite. The Electoral Act of 1963, which conformed largely to pre-independence regulations, became the instrument empowering *matai*-only suffrage - the idea being that as an act of parliament it could be more readily changed than a constitutional provision.

Political events of the 1960s clearly showed the extent of the Samoan impulse to domesticate what is basically a Westminster system to local custom. For many years it had been the practice for high-ranking chiefs to take turns at being their district's representatives in high official office. In 1961, only 18 members out of the 45 Samoan constituencies were elected by secret ballot, the rest being chosen by district consensus. However that number rapidly increased to 27 in the 1964 elections, and by

1982 there was no Samoan constituency which appointed its member of parliament on the basis of a single agreed nomination. Again, the impulse to maintain traditionalist ideas of an "appointed leader" in the new parliamentary setting is shown by the fact that for 14 years after independence the Prime Minister was always a holder of one the four highest *matai* titles. Since 1982, however, none of the Prime Ministers has held any of these "royal son" titles.

The formation of Samoa's present political parties goes back to the early 1980s as well, and is clearly related to the changed ideas about the political significance of the highest titles. The Human Rights Protection Party (the HRPP) is now the dominant political party, and has been so since 1982, in spite of running factional disputes. The current opposition is led by a "royal son" who was previously Prime Minister during the 1970s.

The ideological differences between the political parties in Samoa is still not particularly marked and the government which is formed after an election still depends to a great extent on those who run as Independents and who delay declaring their allegiances until after the nominations for Prime Minister have been made and voting among the elected members begins. This makes for a certain amount of political instability, and a good deal of opportunism. Nevertheless, the success of the HRPP party in the 1991 and 1996 elections have been attributed to both the political acumen of the present Prime

Minister and the strength of the party organisation which he has built up. This is strong at the village level, and is diligently sustained. Members of the HRPP are said to have to sign a pledge of allegiance, and each successful party candidate is allowed to put forward the names of 10 people from his electorate for appointment to various government boards and commissions. In village contexts, such appointments are prestigious and keenly sought after.

The Opposition lacks this sort of backing. Its leader, Tuiatua Tamasese, one of the “royal sons” and a former PM, is said to lack an interest in mundane detail, counting to some extent on traditional support for his rank and on his oratorical skills. Tuiatua is a well-known figure in academic circles in New Zealand and Australia; he has recently held visiting fellowships in both countries, and has published on aspects of traditional Samoan history.

These accomplishments, however, are not known to the mass of Samoan voters - and would probably have very little political impact even if they were. He writes a long column (in Samoan) for a daily newspaper, which is full of compassion and good thoughts; but, according to his critics, he has no alternative policies. Nonetheless, he is a widely-respected national figure and, given shifting circumstances, might be Prime Minister once again.

The contrast between the current PM and the Leader of the Opposition is more than a matter of personalities. It can be read as an indication that party politics is now firmly established in Samoa, displacing many of the more traditional ideas about the place of rank and titles in government.

During the 1960s it was said that “the government of Samoa extends only to the boundaries of Apia” - implying that beyond those limits life was largely self-sufficient and everything was controlled by district and village *matai* councils, which could defy the government as they pleased. Better roads, communications, water and electricity supplies (all accomplished by government and financed by foreign aid) have broken some of this isolationism down.

THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT

It is basically a Westminster system, with a Head of State, a Prime Minister elected by Members of Parliament and 12 cabinet ministers chosen by him from among sitting members. Within this broad framework, however, there are a number of specifically Samoan features which have generated a quite distinctive political culture.

The Head of State is a government appointment, with limited powers. The presumption has always been that the office should be filled by one of the “royal sons” but there is no constitutional necessity for this. The current Head of State is an elderly man, the surviving son of one of the two “royal sons” appointed as Joint Heads for life at the independence. He is immensely honoured, in spite of having joined the Baha’i faith in a quixotic move ten years or so ago.

The office of Head of State is supported by a Chamber of Deputies, the members of which act jointly in the absence or incapacity of the Head of State. The Chamber was created by the constitution specifically for those “royal sons” who were not the Head of State, allowing them

honourable office and substantial salaries; but again, appointments are at the government's discretion. Members of the Chamber do not receive cabinet minutes as a right, and the political influence which any of them may have is wholly dependent on their connections with the government of the day.

There are at present three Deputies, of whom two are "royal sons." One, a former PM, is an ally of the present government; the other is "politically independent" and a lawyer. The third Deputy, Vaai Kolone, is not a "royal son" but a former PM. Still alert and active and dressed much like any village *matai*, he spends his days in his timber yard opposite the produce market, supervising the sale of produce from his lands and chatting with cronies. This is eccentric, though it also has a populist appeal. He is a very experienced man and wields considerable informal influence.

Tofilau Eti, the PM, has been in office more or less continuously for 14 years. He is astute and is reputed to have complete control over both the HRPP party and the government. Although not a "royal son," he is a superb orator, easily a match for the Leader of the Opposition on the floor of the House. This is extremely important since it gives him legitimacy among the electorate at large.

Tofilau has been in failing health for some years, and the indications are that he must retire "soon." According to informed opinion, when that happens the HRPP might lose some of its effectiveness, but remain in power.

Tofilau's successor will be drawn from among his senior ministers. Three in particular are mentioned: the very capable Deputy PM and Minister of Finance; the Minister of Health,

young, energetic and a lawyer who is "well liked"; the Minister of Education, a woman of very high rank, capable and respected. There are two other ministers with New Zealand university degrees in law, and these five individuals together make up what is regarded as the "new guard" in government.

There are 49 seats in Parliament. Forty seven of these are for *matai*; the other two are "non-*matai*," elected by the diminishing proportion of the population who had "European" status at Independence. Although called "Europeans," most were in fact part-Samoans, and because many have since chosen to take *matai* titles, the number of "non-*matai*" seats has been steadily diminishing and will probably be eventually phased out altogether. (The social position of the part-Samoans is explained in more detail below, in the section dealing with the private sector domain).

Members of parliament are not highly paid. Ordinary members receive annual salaries of WS\$11,500 with no allowances and ministers around WS\$33,000, together with allowances which bring up their incomes to around WS\$45,000. The pay of higher civil servants is much higher, and lawyers in private practice can earn over WS\$100,000 a year. Almost all parliamentarians have outside business interests, and many are notorious for the ways in which they exploit their political clout to advantage of these businesses.

In addition to the other "core" Westminster structures such as an independent judiciary (with 3 levels), a civil service directed by the public service Commission, Attorney General, Auditor and Ombudsman, and so forth, there are a host of government boards, corporations and quasi-

independent bodies, all of which make the influence and reach of the government very extensive indeed.

SUFFRAGE

Universal suffrage was introduced by the HRPP in 1990, following a national plebiscite which gave the proposal a clear but not overwhelming majority. The idea was not by any means a new one in Samoa, having been the settled view of a minority for over thirty years; it had also been put forward by a parliamentary committee in the 1970s as a solution to the vexing issue of the multiplication of titles for electoral advantage.

It was partly on these grounds that the HRPP justified its initiation of the move. Women have probably gained by the innovation, although it has not increased the number of women members of parliament, doubtless because it is still only *matai* who can stand for election, and the overwhelming majority of *matai* are men.

BRIBERY AND TREATING

The simple fact that only *matai* may run for parliament has profound significance for the whole political culture of Samoa. As a *matai* seeking support, a candidate must behave like a *matai*, and that means public demonstration of his openhanded liberality - through feasts, donations and gifts of both food and money. Running for parliament is thus an expensive undertaking. Some candidates (and especially those running for the first time) in the 1996 elections are reliably said to have spent in the vicinity of WS\$100,000 on their campaigns. Established sitting members, however, spent much less than that.

This liberality, feasting and gifting is wholly traditional. But electoral procedures and behaviour are also governed by law - in this case one firmly based on New Zealand and Commonwealth precedents. A defeated candidate thus has recourse to the courts, which by now have had extensive experience in deciding where the lines should be drawn between custom and law. Each case, however, is decided "on its merits," and these are infinitely varied.

Although a 21 day cutoff period for customary gifts is prescribed, it is still arguable whether a particular instance represents a bribe to a possible supporter or simply an obligation to a kinsman. The courts are said to be generally inclined to regard food as being more customary than a cash gift, but beer is somewhat equivocal. Voters, moreover, are frank and open with their requests.

Although there was hope in some quarters that the introduction of universal suffrage would somehow do away with bribery and treating, it has in fact apparently made it even more prevalent. In part this is simply because there are more voters, but it also has to do with the fact that many of the voters are now younger people, who are particularly brash and demanding. National elections in Samoa do not display the finesse and sophistication that are believed by many to be part of traditional ways. But then elections are not wholly traditional.

In the wake of the April 1996 elections there were some 7 constituencies in which the winning candidate had to face charges of bribery and corruption. Some were dismissed, while in others countercharges resulted in both candidates being disqualified and a by election called for.

POLITICAL POWER AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Over the years since Independence there have been a number of public scandals over the misuse of public funds by politicians and civil servants - usually initiated by a "whistle-blower" somewhere in the process. Many Samoans believe, in fact, that these sorts of things are endemic and there is little that can be done to change them.

The most recent, and probably the most significant of these scandals was the Controller and Auditor General's Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from January 1993-June 1994. Many people must have been aware of at least some of the malpractices recorded in the Report; what made the report arresting was its detailed documentation of a wide range of particular offenses, the fact that a number of Ministers and high officials were named, and the legal and constitutional clout of the office which issued the Report.

Among the irregularities uncovered were: WSS\$4.1M of uncollected Customs fees (later accounted for); WSS\$150,000 worth of cement and fuel converted for private use or sale; and the fraudulent "hire" of a bulldozer to a private company which used it for 7 months to pull logs. There were also other, smaller matters. In some countries such a report might have led to ministerial resignations or even the downfall of a government. That, however, has not happened. Instead, the issues have been masked by the government's referring the Report to a special Commission of Inquiry (membership of which was chosen by the government) whose duty it was to report back to the government (in effect, Cabinet) rather than to the Legislative Assembly and its Public Accounts Committee, as appears

to be demanded by the Constitution. From that point on, attention has been directed to the legal and constitutional issues involved, matters deliberated upon by the Appeal Court.

The suspended Controller and Chief Auditor, meanwhile, is reported to have received money for his legal fees from various local business people (including WSS\$10,000 from the Society of Accountants). He is not without support, although for obvious reasons much of it is not public. The Leader of the Opposition has also focused attention on it through his newspaper column, sessions on the privately-owned FM radio station, and public statements such as: "I do not get my money by corruption."

Yet in spite of all this, the HRPP party won the April 1996 election with a very comfortable majority while the legal issues were still grinding their way through the courts. Some commentators have attributed this to the degree to which "ordinary people" feel distanced from the affairs of government, or are conditioned by Samoan upbringing to the passive acceptance of authority.

THE VILLAGE FONONO ACT OF 1990

This Act gave legal sanction to *matai* councils to manage village affairs according to customs and tradition. But since the *matai* councils were already acting as though they had that authority from the Constitution (or, what was probably more relevant, from God) the Act did little to change the course of daily life in most villages. It seems obvious that the real intention of the Act was to assure the councils that the forthcoming shift to universal suffrage was not intended to undermine their authority in any way.

But the Act did also serve to bolster custom as against certain individual rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Certain traditional rights such as that to banish offenders from the village and the right to control commerce, had been successfully challenged in the courts over the years, so that there was in fact a “grey area” between custom and law which was of concern to some councils.

The Act did clarify some (though not all) of the issues involved. Specifically, it empowered councils to make rules concerning hygiene, the development of village lands, village work and the imposition of fines and work penalties. It said nothing specific about the more delicate issues of banishment and destruction of offenders’ property, although these could be argued to apply under the more general clause empowering councils to “exercise any power or authority in accordance with the customs and usage of the village.”

The Act also made provision for appealing the judgements of councils - though since appeals were to be made to the Land and Titles Court rather than civil courts, some people are still concerned about the fate of individual rights.

THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Although New Zealand went to considerable lengths to ensure that Samoa attained independence with a political system acceptable to both Samoans and the United Nations, it largely neglected the development of the public service, particularly in the fields of Administration and Education.

Under the pre-Second World War New Zealand Administration the Samoan Public Service was

basically a tropical outpost of the NZ Public Service Commission, with all senior and intermediate posts occupied by expatriates seconded from Wellington. Nothing was done to “Samoanize” the service. Such was the power of the NZ Public Service Commission that this situation continued until the mid-1950s, with the Samoan Public Service directly under the control of Commissioners appointed by New Zealand and responsible to Wellington rather than the Government of Samoa. As a historian of the period has written

.....the Commissioner sat astride the path of progress, unimaginative, self-righteous, enmeshed in the coils of punctilio and routine....Samoa was forced to go forward to independence inadequately provided with the corps of experienced administrators that forms so essential a part of any sound system of government.¹

Similar observations have been made about the field of education, which in the 1930s was dominated by the attitude that too much formal education could only prove unsettling for the majority of Samoans, whose needs were adequately served by the curriculum followed by pastors in the village schools. New Zealand did, however, provide a higher level of education at selected schools in Apia - mainly for those of “European” status, together with a few selected Samoans; this was widely resented by Samoans, many of whom moved to Apia especially for their children’s education. It was not until 1953 that the first secondary school, Samoa College, was opened - specifically as “a help toward self government.”

Some of the legacy of these policies remains - not in all areas of the public service, but quite evident from even a brief visit to almost any school or government department. At issue there are both policy and financial questions, and these are in the process of being addressed by the present government.

THE PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION STRIKE

White collar employment has always been prestigious and sought after in Samoa. As soon as opportunities in the public service became more available in the 1960s, they were rapidly filled by those with the highest levels of formal education, including many of the first batch of scholarship students returning from New Zealand.

Over the years, and as the general level of formal education in the country has improved, the public service has continued to draw into its ranks a very large proportion of the most highly-qualified people available. From the beginning they have formed a quite distinct social category of the population, marked off from others by their levels of education, their ethic of service and commitment to "modernising" ideals, as well as their individual incomes. It was not until the early 1980s, however, that the public servants asserted themselves on the national scene. It was a time of severe financial stringencies, marked by cutbacks, devaluation of the currency and rises in the cost of living, and it was these that provoked the strike for higher pay in 1981.

The Samoa Public Service Association had existed for many years as a branch of the New Zealand PSA, but it lacked any coherent leadership or direction. It was reorganised in

1979, registered with the government as an organisation representing labour, and began to negotiate with both the Minister in Charge of the Public Service and the PM.

When these talks broke down, the strike began. Most government operations were paralysed, schools were closed and communications with the outside world were severed. Four thousand people marched to present a petition, large public meetings were held, bands played, food came in from the rural *'aiga* and the annual Independence celebrations were disrupted.

The whole operation, in fact, was rapidly Samoanized - even though it was also an open affront, not to a faceless government, but to well-known public figures who represented the dignity of Samoan tradition.² Not surprisingly, the strikers' demands were refused, and the strike might have collapsed at that point had it not been supported by Opposition members of Parliament, who used it for their own political ends. It was not until 14 weeks after it began that the strike finally ended.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Since 1981, the PSA has been relatively quiescent, perhaps because a number of the leaders in the present government were among those who supported the PSA cause when they were in Opposition in 1981. Evidence for this comes from the fact that in 1988 the PM announced that the PSA would be one of his portfolios - a move that was vigorously opposed by local newspapers and which eventually prompted a new PSA executive to be elected, thus preserving the association's independence from government.

More recently, the PSA has been involved in discussions with the government on the issues of Public Sector reform, particularly those having to do with cutbacks and organisational changes. The talks have been reported as being non-confrontational and more in the nature of "background briefings" than direct negotiations. The government has been cautious about cutbacks in the public service, and any statements about the issue have been phrased in terms of "natural attrition" and the necessity of waiting until the new "performance budgeting" has been thoroughly trialed and set in place.

The government remains by far the largest employer in the country. There are some 4000 permanent public service employees, with a further 2000 classified as part-time or temporary workers. Their pay rates are hardly spectacular, but then many of the jobs are not particularly onerous and discipline is not severe. In this situation it appears that most public servants are content to confine their work organisation to sports teams and social occasions rather than force issues with a watchful and powerfully entrenched government.

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL AND POLITICAL DOMAINS

It is a common observation that Samoans have always resisted the centralisation of political power in favour of local autonomy. This was a feature of the pre-European polity, and continued through the wars and factional disputes of the 19th century and the resistance to New Zealand rule in the 1920. Furthermore, the issue was not resolved by the constitution of the independent state, with its unusual and

uneasy juxtaposition of custom and law, and it continues in the present.

Taxation Protests of 1994-1995.

In January 1994, the government imposed a new price order and a 10 percent Value Added General Service Tax (VAGST), together with a 10 percent cut in income tax. This provoked widespread attention and protest. The Observer newspaper provided a focus for much of the concern, which was that the new move shifted the tax burden from the relatively well-off to the poor and would thus exacerbate existing inequalities.

Later in January the protest movement was crystallised by an alliance between *Tumua ma Pule* (a nationally powerful orator group) and the opposition groups in Parliament led by Tuiatua Tamasese. Newspaper reports emphasised the significance of the involvement of *Tumua ma Pule*: "one of the oldest democratic systems in the world, the Fa'a Matai.." and "Even if *Tumua* and *Pule*'s role in the Constitution may not be clearly defined...this is Samoa's inherent constitution not disfigured by time, nurtured by memory and passed on from generation to generation."³

In early March, between ten and fifteen thousand people joined a protest march to the Head of State's residence demanding the repeal of the VAGST legislation. From there the marchers went back to the open area outside the government building in Apia, where some 2000 people set up camp, announcing their intention to stay until their demands were met. Food was brought in by supporting villages. The Catholic church donated WSS\$5000 and the Methodist church WSS\$1000 to the protest.

For Samoa, these were stirring events, and a degree of public protest and demonstration unknown since the days of the Mau resistance to New Zealand rule in the 1920s. Nevertheless, the government did not meet the demands. Duties on some essential food items were reduced, but the Prime Minister reiterated the economic necessity for VAGST on national television and dismissed the protest as being simply engineered by the Opposition parties. The campers dispersed after 17 days on the understanding that they would return if economic conditions did not improve.

That, however, was not the end. *Tumua ma Pule* then organised a petition to the Head of State demanding repeal of VAGST and also action on the Controller and Auditor General's report on corruption. The petition was signed by 122,000 people in Samoa and a further 10,000 Samoans in New Zealand. Again, however, the Prime Minister refused to bow to pressure, dismissing the protest as politically inspired and pointing out (1) that under the Constitution the Head of State could not act alone, (2) that members of his own party were also affiliated with the *Tumua ma Pule* orator group, and (3) that many of the petition signatures were irregular. He also criticised the churches for getting involved in State matters and, later, by way of retaliation, refused to exempt them in any way from payment of the tax.

The Samoa Lands Corporation

A much less publicised challenge from the Traditional domain in recent years has been villagers' occupation of former WSTEC lands, effectively preventing moves to privatise them. In accordance with an ADB provision that WSTEC should be disbanded and transferred

to the private sector, a proportion of WSTEC lands were made over to the Samoa Lands Corporation in 1990. The SLC then subdivided some of them and put the blocks up for lease by tender. The leases were eagerly sought by Samoans with money or political connections, both in Samoa and overseas, but in spite of the lease provisions that the land should be developed for commercial agriculture within three months, many leaseholders failed to do so, simply collecting the coconuts for sale.

What the leaseholders obviously hoped was that the leases would rise in value or that the lands would somehow pass into their more permanent ownership. Becoming aware of this, people from villages adjoining several former WSTEC estates simply moved onto the lands, planted them with subsistence crops, and squatted. They assumed that it would be political suicide for the government to forcibly remove them - more particularly since, in many cases, they claimed that the land was originally "theirs" in the days before the German plantations.

This has effectively stymied the plan to fully develop commercial agriculture - although that development might already have been in doubt because of the low prestige of agriculture, the prevailing prices for agricultural commodities and the rudimentary marketing and processing facilities that were available. Be that as it may, the villagers' actions are supported by a widespread view that the WSTEC lands are a sacred trust for "all Samoans" rather than a commercial entity controlled by "the government" alone - particularly when the benefits from it are likely to go to those who already have the money.

The impasse thus involves tensions between both different socioeconomic status groupings and different domains, and is a clear case of what seemed to be an economically sound idea being prescribed without a clear understanding of the social and political issues involved.

SUMMARY FEATURES OF THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

- Because of the requirement that parliamentary candidates must hold chiefly *matai* titles, they must behave like *matai*, which means a heavy commitment to political patronage and the monetary support of local interests.
- Party politics have emerged only in the past fifteen years, under the aegis of the present ruling HRPP party. While this has meant that elections have become somewhat more dependent on national policy issues than they previously were, many MPs are still elected as Independents. Political power (and thus national policies) still hinge upon a few figures prominent enough to be elected as Prime Minister.
- The present ruling party has been in power for over a decade and has a clear commitment to responsible economic policies and the overall development of education and health. These policies have been successfully put across to the electorate in spite of extraordinary opposition. The present Prime Minister has been instrumental in achieving this, but he is in failing health.
- The very powerful 1994-95 opposition to the imposition of a Value Added Goods and Service Tax was led by a national orator group (the “kingmakers” of old Samoa) in the interests of the traditional domain and as the

embodiment of what is still regarded by many as “Samoa’s *inherent* constitution.”

- There may be parallels here with the situation in Papua New Guinea, where national policies are very much at the peril of local interests. This comparison only goes so far, however. Samoa is in no danger of flying apart, if only because the *matai* system remains as “a *unified* system of dispersed power”⁴ and the political system is well integrated with it. In the meantime, tensions between the traditional and public domains remain.
- Since Samoa’s key resources are controlled by the traditional domain, economic development policies cannot be imposed from above. Much will depend on cooperative strategies - as well as markets for local commodities.

NOTES

¹ Davidson 1967:215.

² Wendt, 1981.

³ From the “Observer” newspaper, as quoted by Coxon 1996 in her useful summary of these events.

⁴ The phrase is taken from Malama Meleisea (1987:1)

THE PRIVATE SECTOR DOMAIN

Private commercial enterprises have been established in Samoa for well over a hundred years - the idea having been introduced by some of the earliest European residents who married Samoan women and set themselves up as planters and small traders. Difficulties over acquiring secure title to land prevented the establishment of a large class of wealthy European plantation owners. However, many of the nineteenth century European residents, especially those who married high-ranking Samoan women, did acquire influential Samoan connections and rights to the use of land for their trading and other commercial ventures.

The German regime, because of the reigning European ideas about "racial" differences and abilities, had difficulties over the social and legal classification of the part-Samoan offspring of these marriages - the issue being whether they were "Samoans" or "Europeans." Eventually, individuals were sorted on a case by case basis, using criteria that were also, in time, followed by the New Zealand administration. The difference mattered, since "Europeans" had legal, educational and medical privileges, as well as a higher wages and salary scale.

By the mid-1930s, there were some 2300 part-Samoans with "European" status who were divided into two distinct socioeconomic classes: a small Apia-based middle class and a large underprivileged class. The Apia-based middle class in turn was divided into two: (1) a group who lived very much as middle-class Europeans, backed up by prosperous businesses

and access to overseas education for their children; and (2) small businessmen and skilled workers whose lives were a mixture of Samoan and European influences. The families of both these groups maintained connections with their Samoan kin, but avoided a too-close identification with them.¹

This Apia-based middle class laid the foundation of the present-day private sector in Samoa. The families intermarried extensively with one another to produce a bewildering network of kin connections along which commercial and professional influences travelled with ease. Wholesaling and retail trade were the most prosperous enterprises.

With independence, many of the middle class found it advantageous to take *matai* titles and identify more closely with Samoan matters. With wealth, education, connections to high-ranking Samoan families and *matai* titles, they rapidly made the transition into political office, and frequently became members of the cabinet. For many years, during the 1960s and 1970s, very significant proportions of the members of parliament were those who, in earlier days, would have classified themselves as "European." As higher education became more available to Samoans during the 1950s and 1960s, and as the government-sponsored scholarship students have returned from overseas, greater numbers of "pure" Samoans have made their marks in politics.

In recent years the part-Samoan middle class has also lost some of the commercial advantage which it used to enjoy. Samoans and particularly a few Samoan-Chinese families have followed very much the same path and have built up significant business conglomerates.

Today, the private sector appears to be booming in and around Apia, particularly with tertiary services (wholesale and retail trade; restaurants and hotels; transport; storage and communications; finance; real estate and business services; social and personal services.) Many of the new entrants to these activities are relatively small operations, working on low margins, with a significant proportion of them being the "sideline" activities of members of parliament and people in the public service.

Much of this activity is driven by the expansion of tourism and aid projects of one sort or another, together with help from remittances, and is attractive because the "lead-in times" are relatively short and the work is of a white collar kind. By comparison, the primary and secondary sectors have grown much less rapidly, if at all. This is unfortunate because many local economists see some of the long-term future of the country as based on these sectors. The problems here are only in part technical ones; the major difficulties are social and political, as illustrated in the section on the Samoa Land Corporation above.

STATISTICS

Reliable data are difficult to locate, since what records exist are frequently several years out of date and inconsistent one with another. The most informed estimate available puts the private sector as currently made up of some 14,000 employees and 500 employers, with some 70

percent of the employers having less than 20 employees and a significant number of people "self-employed."

The latest published figures available are for 1993 and show the total number of employees in the country at that time as being 18,124, with 12,054 in the private sector as against 6,070 in the public sector. Of the 536 registered employers at that time, 15 (3 percent) were engaged in primary activities, 114 (21 percent) in secondary activities and 407 (76 percent) in tertiary activities.

Average weekly wage rates in the private sector at that time were as follows:

Primary:	WS\$ 75.00
Secondary:	130.00
Tertiary:	160.00

These figures may be compared with those for the public sector, where the average weekly wage rate was WS\$148.00; this figure, however, includes casuals and temporary workers, so the average salary rate for the public sector would have been higher than WS\$148.00. The minimum wage rate legislated by government is currently WS\$1.00 an hour.

The largest private sector employer by far is the Japanese manufacturing company Yazaki, which has over 2000 employees in its Apia factory. The overwhelming majority of these are women, who earn a minimum rate of WS\$1.56 an hour for shift work on assembly lines.

WORKERS' ORGANISATIONS

Although various international union organisations have approached the Labour Department over the years, asking for cooperation in the formation of local unions,

they have not met with much Department cooperation. Nevertheless, there is a National Workers' Union in Samoa which currently has half a dozen workplaces affiliated with it. The union leaders previously had experience with unions in New Zealand, and have been described as "typical old-time NZ unionists, who know little of the newer union practices in that country."

The official view is that Samoan customary practices can handle the employer-employee relationship much more adequately than any more formal, foreign arrangement. And given the small size of the workplaces and the generally low profile of the National Workers' Union, that view would seem to be widely shared.

Yazaki currently runs what might be called an employer's union, providing free health care, free lunches, free transportation and many other benefits, including organised leisure activities. These arrangements have found ready acceptance among the company's large labour force.

BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS

The local Chamber of Commerce has around 100 members, at a subscription of WSS\$200/year. Several government corporations are members. The Chamber has made submissions on tax and tariff reforms. It has a good working relationship with the Minister of Finance and is generally very satisfied with all the reforms that he has been putting in place. There is also a Manufacturers' Association with some 30 members, and which is generally less satisfied with government policies. Freight charges have been of concern to exporters, and they seek subsidies for this.

The Chamber and the Association have recently come together for joint meetings, the first of which was addressed at length by the Governor of the Reserve Bank, who gave a detailed explanation of the Bank's monetary policies. There is now a general feeling abroad in the business community that "We are all in this together [with the government]" and there are excellent opportunities for negotiations and dialogue.

There is also a new Women in Business Foundation, which has been concerned to promote the interests of the small enterprises which many women have started, mainly retail shops and restaurants and accommodation. The Foundation has expanded to include the rural Womens' Committees, although the interests of these two groups are often very divergent.

The Small Business Enterprise Centre funded by New Zealand aid has done valuable work in training small-time business operators. The majority of small Samoan-owned businesses still prefer to operate, however, through personal networks and more ad-hoc methods. The Centre has recently organised a well-publicised scheme of "Excellence in Business Awards," which has drawn the support of many medium and large-scale business operations.

SUMMARY FEATURES OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR DOMAIN

- Private commercial enterprises were first established by part European-Samoan families in and around Apia. Although they grew to dominate wholesale and retail trade, the large firms have lost some ground

over the past 10-15 years to newer local enterprises, many run by part Chinese-Samoans.

- The tertiary sector has grown considerably over the past decade or so, driven by the expansion of tourism, aid funds and remittances. Many of the new entrants are small operators working on low margins, and a significant proportion are sideline activities of people employed in the public sector.
- By comparison, the primary and secondary sectors have grown much less rapidly. Among the reasons for this are the low prestige of agricultural work, the shortage of labour due to emigration, the commodity prices and marketing difficulties.
- The recently-established Yazaki Corporation's assembly-line activities seem to have met with general acceptance, in spite

of low wages, a ready supply of labour - mainly women.

- The stable economic policies of the present government have met with very general approval in the commercial community, and there seem to be no major tensions between the private sector domain and either the traditional or public domains. Government regulations can still be petty and irksome, but there are indications that many of these will be changed in time.

NOTES

¹Meleisea, 1987:177.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPINGS

The bulk of the population is village-based, living mainly on the resources of customary lands from subsistence crops and small commodity production, remittances and rural employment. In this situation the economic differences between families are not great. The main differences are those of rank, according to the position of the *matai* within the hierarchy of village and district titles. There is a definite tendency for rank to be directly associated with economic status, but this is a long-term process, taking a generation or so. Within the traditional domain, both pastors and entrepreneurs have economic standing and advantage, but their positions commit them heavily to traditional goals; pastors gain their economic standing through their high rank and entrepreneurs must redistribute considerable amounts to traditional causes in order to maintain their economic advantage.

Wage labourers and semiskilled workers in the towns are in many ways simply an adjunct of the rural population. They do not have the financial independence to separate themselves from the resources of rural production. Many commute from the peri-urban villages or live on customary lands within the urban area, contributing cash to households based on a mixture of resources. A large proportion are women or younger, untitled men.

What may be called a "middle class" grouping is divided into two fractions. The first consists

of clerks, public servants in the lower grades, teachers, nurses and small business people who have the resources to maintain a more "European" lifestyle than wage workers and who may have titles - usually more junior ones. The second is made up of higher public servants, wealthy business people and professionals who buy property and set up independent households. They seek private or overseas education for their children, patronize the golf club and other organisations, and tend to acquire titles of middle or high rank.

The power elite is made up of cabinet members, the "royal sons," very wealthy business people and the managers of public corporations. Entry into this group depends heavily on political and family connections, education and wealth. While it is possible to be one of this elite without having a *matai* title (for example, the two "European" members of parliament) the great majority do have titles of middle to high rank and contribute conspicuously to public causes and to traditional ceremonies and events. Rank and power have a definite tendency to coalesce.

Wealth and education are the keys to socioeconomic advancement. Rank by itself is not enough, but to be socially acceptable, socioeconomic status requires legitimation by rank.

TOPIC AREAS

GENDER

Although the role relationships between Samoan men and women have changed a lot over the last century or so, they are still characterised by many distinctively Samoan ideas, values and practices. The topic is perhaps most clearly set out according to the different social contexts which are involved.¹

Family and kinship relations

Girls get privileged consideration, especially from adolescence on, with better sleeping accommodation than their brothers and lighter work, more often indoors. They are also more restricted in their movements around a village, and are frequently chaperoned by younger children. There is a special delicacy and reserve between brothers and sisters with regard to sexuality. After adolescence brother and sister will avoid all interactions except those that may be strictly necessary, and neither is supposed to have any knowledge of the other's sexual activities (which are condoned in boys and forbidden to girls). In the case of a girl receiving unwanted attention from a man, it is the duty of her brother(s) to put a stop to it - with violence if necessary. Both males and females are now involved in garden work; untitled men do the cooking for large-scale family meals.

'Aiga and extended family relations

At marriage, a bride generally moves to her husband's village. She does not, however, lose membership in her natal 'aiga, and can partake

in meetings concerned with title bestowals in the same way that all other members do. She and her descendants are also held to have a special moral authority in such matters, and any sickness or misfortune befalling her brother may be attributed to her displeasure - and provoke recompense and apologies.

A marriage can set up a formal "covenant" between the two 'aiga concerned, such that they will thereafter stand to each other in a special relationship which is not unlike that between brother and sister. This is important mainly between 'aiga of high rank, and involves enduring reciprocal obligations to contribute to each other's ceremonial affairs, especially funerals. This may crosscut and introduce special complications to the normal rank differences between the 'aiga concerned.

Village relations

Formerly, the unmarried daughters of a village, together with married women who had returned to the village, formed a separate body known as the *auvaluma*. Women within it were ranked according to the ranking of their 'aiga, with the one holding highest rank being the "ceremonial virgin" who officiated at kava ceremonies. Members of the *auvaluma* stayed together in a separate dwelling. The Christian churches disapproved of the institution, and there are today no separate *auvaluma* groups except in the half-dozen or so villages which are the focus of politically important orator groups.

The institution that has taken its place in most villages is the *komiti* (from the English "committee"), which has its origins in the women's auxiliaries set up by the New Zealand administration to promote health and sanitation. Within the now omnipresent and frequently influential village *komitis*, women are ranked according to their husband's titles. Nevertheless, for ceremonial village affairs, the *komiti* may be formally divided into an *auauma*, the wives of chiefs and the wives of untitled men.

Village *komitis* are now active and important institutions in every Samoan village. They both raise funds independently for village and church projects and also see that the projects are carried through to completion. It is widely acknowledged that many school buildings and village clinics would never have been achieved without the organised activities of women in the *komitis* concerned.

This raises interesting issues about power and authority in the traditional village domain. Universally, throughout the villages, the *matai* councils have unchallenged authority to make binding decisions on local matters. The *komitis* do not challenge this authority, seeing their role as being a complementary one, patterned to some extent on the complementarity which is a part of both the brother:sister and the husband:wife relationships.

Power, however, is somewhat more equivocal and women express different views. A position commonly taken by village women is that it is simply not their "place" to be concerned with local governance; this position is well exemplified by a woman who said (to a Samoan woman researcher)

*"I know I would make a better matai than my brother. But I would rather my brother had the title. For him it is important. I am so proud to see my brother mixing with the other matai. And he is proud to be our matai."*²A slightly different position is that women in fact have very considerable informal power because they have power in family decisions, and the *matai* councils are merely the formalisation of family-based decisions. Furthermore, according to this view, women have a double influence - through their brothers in their natal villages, and also through their husbands, where they are living. A third opinion is that real power lies in the *komitis*: "all the *matai* do is talk. We aren't interested in wasted words...We have work to do."

The national context

The last of the views set out above was expressed by a prominent Samoan woman educationist with a university degree, in the course of a speech delivered at a regional workshop on Women in Politics organised by the National Council of Women. Emphasising the fact that it was the *komitis* which provided the energy and staying power for village projects, she went on to point out women's considerable influence in Samoa was not wholly dependent on women's representation in Parliament.

There are in fact only two women members of parliament at the present time, although one of them, the Minister of Education, has high cabinet ranking and a high *matai* title. Her view on the matter is that women should be more prepared to take titles, since only in that way

will they have the political authority to make lasting institutional changes of benefit to women. It is a view which does not in any way challenge the *matai* system; if anything, it supports the system, by calling on women to join and use their influence from within.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs, established in 1991, has 8 staff members and 6 casual workers. The main function of the Ministry is to promote and coordinate the *komitis* in the fields of primary health care, home economics, gardening and income-generating activities - particularly those involving handicrafts. The Ministry also has an Advisory Committee made up of the administrative heads of various other departments or their representatives (invariably women) together with 8 other people elected by NGOs.

There are more than 50 women's NGOs. Two of these are large umbrella organisations: the National Council of Women, with over 2000 individual members, and the Women's Development Committee, with over 6000 individual members. The others range over a wide field: health, sports, church-related, old pupils associations and so forth.

Statistics

At the time of the 1991 census, 68 percent of the Economically Active category (i.e. those aged 15 years and over) were male, and 32 percent women. The 1991 census included special probes designed to find out the extent to which women who described themselves as engaged in "home duties" (and were thus not "economically active") were in fact involved in subsistence agriculture and household economic activities, and figures were adjusted accordingly.

The lower proportion of women who are economically active, as compared with men, is thus not simply an artefact of data collection, and probably reflects traditional roles and preferences.

A number of other differences in the statistical profiles of men and women follow from this. Of the economically active, two thirds of both men and women are unpaid workers in agriculture. Almost all the remaining men and women are employees, with only 1 percent of each category being employers; a higher proportion of men (6 percent) are self-employed, by comparison with women (2 percent).

In terms of occupations, there are greater proportions of the economically active women in the following fields:

- Professionals: 11 percent of women compared to 5 percent of men
- Clerks: 7 percent of women compared to 3 percent of men
- Service and shop workers: 8 percent of women compared to 3 percent of men.

By comparison, there are greater proportions of the economically active men in the following fields:

- Legislators, senior officials and managers: 2 percent of men compared to 1 percent of women.
- Crafts and trade: 7 percent of men compared to 2 percent of women
- Plant and machine operators: 4 percent of men compared to 0 percent of women. (It should be noted, however, that since the 1991 census, the Yazaki company has set up operations in

Apia and now employs some 2000 assembly-line workers, almost all of whom are women.)

Of the 4000 or so public service employees, 53 percent are female. Of these, slightly over half are in teaching, 30 percent in administration and 13 percent in nursing. Within the administration category, women are heavily concentrated in the lowest grade; less than 2 percent of the women are in the two most senior positions, by comparison with 6 percent of the men.

These differences do not reflect differences in the education of males and females. Opportunities are the same for both, and their attainments are also roughly equal.

DECISION MAKING AND PARTICIPATION

Meetings are a pervasive feature of traditional rural life. Every village organisation has to have them - from the *matai* councils through Womens' Committees, the separate *'aiga*, the deacons, choirs and other church groups, the *aumaga*, sports teams and so on. No decision can be regarded as truly binding unless it has been ratified by an open meeting 'of the group concerned, and such meetings cover everything from broad policy issues down to the smallest organisational details. (In one extreme though well-attested case, a village *matai* council once spent over an hour deciding whether to fix a local levy at 40 cents or 50 cents).

These village meetings follow a fairly set protocol, with a topic being raised and then widely discussed before the more senior participants come in with their views. The various possibilities are then summed up and discussed before the leader of the meeting proposes a consensus. If this is not agreed on, a vote may be called for. Finally, everyone present

is asked to agree to the majority view - thus creating a binding consensus.

In many ways, then, such meetings approach the ideal of participatory democracy. It is, however, a democracy which is heavily coloured by the *matai* system (as so much of Samoan life is). *Matai* councils are the highest village and district authorities; untitled men may listen to the deliberations, but only *matai* may speak.

This of course obscures "the will of the majority." For example, when the Parliamentary Commission on Lands and Titles in the 1970s was making its rounds of the various districts, it could, by custom, meet only with *matai* councils. And these councils gave their "unified" and "consensus" decisions, without regard for either minority *matai* opinion, or the opinions of women and untitled men. In these circumstances, the move to universal suffrage could probably never have been made without a national plebiscite - which was by its very nature something of an affront to the "*matai* system."

At the national level, the power of Cabinet is virtually unchecked, with the government caucus seldom called into session and relatively uninfluential. This is a common enough pattern within many Westminster systems, but it is given a special force in present-day Samoa because of the long period that the ruling party has been in power and the general weakness of the Opposition.

Parliamentary sessions (which are almost exclusively in Samoan) are broadcast on the national radio and draw a large audience throughout the country; the cabinet ministers are

the major figures in these debates, with backbenchers relegated to supporting roles, or addressing most of their speeches to their particular constituencies.

None of the newspapers reports parliamentary sessions in detail. However, the independent "Observer," which appears five times weekly in both Samoan and English, publishes editorials which are frequently highly critical of the government, as well as Letters to the Editor and a regular column in Samoan by the Leader of the Opposition. The paper also carries a humorous daily column by the editor commenting on many public issues and detailing his (generally fruitless) attempts to get government ministers to comment on issues.

Not surprisingly, the paper is not in good odour with the government and party, who criticise it for its destructive and negative attitudes. The paper does undoubtedly have some influence, however, and in recent months one of the ministers has adopted the practice of making detailed replies in Letters to the Editor; other ministers maintain stony silence.

Apart from the "Observer" there is a twice-weekly government newspaper, the "Savali," which prints news of government occasions and policies without comment, and a small Sunday newspaper which appears in both Samoan and English. The government-run television station provides exhaustive and largely unedited coverage of Prime-Ministerial speeches and of some official events. Then there are some 14 smaller and somewhat irregular newspapers, none of which is as highly critical as the "Observer," and a privately owned FM station on which the Leader of the Opposition conducts a regular talk-back session.

Both of the largest churches, the Congregational Christian Church and the Methodists, hold large annual meetings lasting over a week at which a great variety of topics are discussed, both in committees and plenary sessions. These are attended by representatives from every congregation. Detailed financial accounts are presented, making public the contributions made by each congregation and allowing each to be compared to all the others. In both churches, a ruling body of senior ministers makes the final policy decisions - which are generally conservative, masking the views of the many younger ministers and church officials who can be seen as more progressive and liberal.

Demonstrations and picketing for the expression of minority views are virtually unknown, and would be considered absurd as well as impolite. This, however, does not prevent the occurrence of large organised demonstrations and marches such as those that took place during the PSA strike and the VAGST protests. But here again the events had a certain decorum and sense of carnival, in spite of the widespread fears of violence in both instances.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Some 80 percent of the land resources of the country are held by customary tenure and are under the control of the *matai* system, which is the basic institutional structure of the traditional domain. Although there are undoubtedly inequalities in the amount and quality of lands available to different individuals and kin groups, land for subsistence is very widely available for anyone who needs it.

The argument is frequently made that the system of customary tenure inhibits agricultural production, particularly of export commodities.

There is undoubtedly truth in this, but there are also other factors at work. For one thing, Samoans have chosen to export their labour to where it commands much better returns, receiving remittances from the emigrant communities in return. There are thus labour shortages in the traditional domain.

Although land for commercial agriculture has recently been made available for lease from the Samoa Land Corporation, it appears to have been being used more for investment and speculative purposes by the middle class than for production. And since villagers see the land that was formerly theirs passing into the control of moneyed people, they have sought to prevent the process - for their own traditional ends.

There are no large-scale fishing enterprises, and the present need for fish is satisfied by small-scale artisanal operators. Forestry resources are also under customary control, and what milling there is used almost exclusively for the local market.

NOTES

¹ The following exposition draws heavily on Schoeffel, 1995.

² Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991:89.

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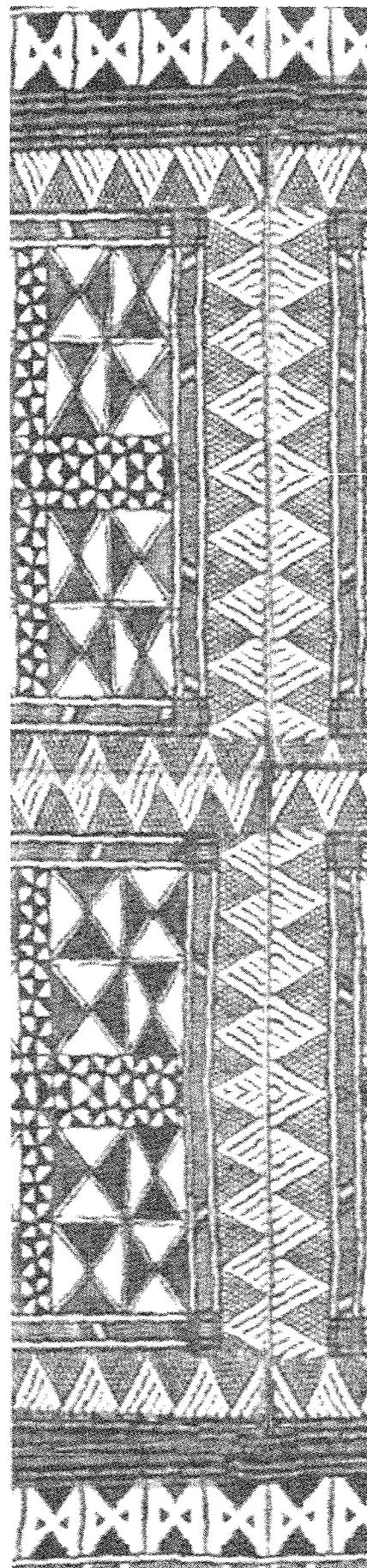
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