EDITOR'S FORUM

PREDICAMENTS IN POLYNESIA: CULTURE AND CONSTITUTIONS IN WESTERN SAMOA AND TONGA

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Both Western Samoa and Tonga have adopted unique constitutions, each reached by very different recent histories. Yet two hundred years ago these societies appeared similar, at least to foreigners. This essay briefly compares and contrasts the histories of Western Samoa and Tonga, whose formal constitutions were devised with necessary compromises between tradition and modernity in order to cope with modern legislative needs. The Western Samoan and Tongan constitutions have recently faced challenges to the systems of representation originally devised in them. These challenges are described and the advantages and disadvantages faced by each country in adapting to change are briefly discussed in terms of its attitudes to history, tradition, and contemporary politics.

Samoa and Tonga lie in the southwest extremity of Polynesia, which spreads to Hawaii far to the northeast and to beyond French Polynesia to the southeast. Tonga and Western Samoa are two of the geographically closest Polynesian countries: Their nearest islands are a mere 300 kilometers apart. The people and their ways of life were and are more similar to each other than to those of the Melanesian countries to the northwest. For centuries there was both friendly and warlike contact between them. There was chiefly intermarriage, and each nation figures in the traditional stories and legends of the other.

Starting with similar Polynesian social systems, Samoa and Tonga

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were in contact with European and American influences from the earliest part of the nineteenth century. By the close of that century the government of Samoa was fragmented in the face of colonization while Tonga had developed a centralized government.

Eventually, both nations established national independence with constitutional compromises between the need for modernity and a desire to maintain Polynesian custom and tradition. Recently, in both Tonga and Western Samoa, some of these compromises have been threatened, and political reforms are either under way or will have to be considered to maintain domestic stability. A 1990 referendum in Western Samoa showed a majority of those who voted to be in favor of universal suffrage in place of voting by *matai* (titled chiefs, the heads of extended families); in Tonga pressure is growing for more-accountable government and better-balanced representation through a redistribution of seats in the Legislative Assembly. In each case, the changes would undermine traditional allegiances to chiefs in favor of a more-representative political system.

The Precontact Period: Constitutional Foundations

Precontact life is summarized here, on the basis of accounts by Meleisea et al. (1987b) for Samoa and Latukefu (1974) for Tonga.

There is little evidence of major differences between the lifestyles in Samoa and Tonga when they were first observed by foreigners. Kinship structures were almost identical. Families, and particularly orators, studied and memorized genealogies that affirmed the position and rank of individuals and family groups. The position and status of women were particularly important, with the eldest sister in each family carrying the highest social rank. Differences among ranks were enforced by social rules.

Both societies had layers of chiefs, some of whose functions were real while those of others were more spiritual, and society placed taboos on the interaction of chiefs with others. Punishments for breaking taboos were strict and sometimes brutal. Both Samoa and Tonga had language structures in which respect and status were implicit and indirectness was important. Although chiefly rank was, to some extent, expected to be inherited, the real situation was fluid. Ascendancy relied as much on having the support of an influential constituency as on inheritance. Both Samoa and Tonga had mechanisms by which an incompetent successor with claims through inheritance could be debarred from holding a position of authority.

Both societies had reciprocal obligation systems to which both the highest and lowest members contributed. The contributions could take many forms. The resulting chiefly authority was finely balanced with community decision making through consensus. People and land were closely linked, strengthening other kin relationships. While on one level a person would have a strong spiritual relation to a particular place, on another level there could be claims of wide-ranging relationships of varying importance to other families and places. These would be brought into play according to the political needs of particular circumstances. In both countries the management and distribution of land was a responsibility of local chiefs. Tenure was given in return for services and could be withdrawn.

Some evidence suggests Tonga was more inclined to centralized authority than Samoa. For example, in Samoa the fono (a meeting or council) was a mechanism for discussion of village policies; meetings would go on for days until agreement evolved. In Tonga, the *fono* seems to have been a meeting at which chiefly decisions were conveyed to village members without discussion (Martin 1817). Latukefu (1975) notes that offenders in Tonga were not brought before the *fono* for public trial as in Samoa. Offenses were dealt with directly by *'eiki* (nobles): There was no appeal against punishment.

Centralization of authority was more evident in Tonga also in the early emergence of a supreme spiritual ruler who was revered by the population at large but appeared to exercise little practical power. A quite different pattern emerged in Samoa, where there remained four paramount chiefs with similar status to each other, none of whom even today is able to claim a superior role--at least in traditional terms.

Constitutional Development: Foreign Influences

Both Samoa and Tonga experienced precolonial settlement led by traders and missionaries. Early visitors to both countries found Polynesians remarkably hospitable, indeed welcoming. Beachcombers were able to settle and eke out relatively comfortable lifestyles in harmony with Polynesian populations. But hospitality expressed a formal obligation, unrelated to personal attitudes and emotions. As a result of these early foreign settlements, protection of foreign nationals was to become a significant issue in the external relations of both countries. Samoa was subject to more intensive economic exploitation than Tonga because it offered extensive yet compact fertile land better suited to agriculture, and it had an excellent harbor close to busy marine trade routes. As a

result Samoa experienced greater competition between the great rivals for power in the Pacific.

In the mid-nineteenth century the United States of America, Britain, and Germany were involved. Rivalry between Britain and the United States resulted in Samoa's having a premier who was an American in 1875. But German interests became paramount following the Berlin General Act of 1889 and its revision in 1899, which formalized the spheres of interest of Great Britain and Germany in the Treaty of Berlin. Eastern Samoa came under American influence with the agreed establishment of a coaling station there in 1878, leading eventually to its annexation. There was German settlement in Tonga, particularly in Vava'u in the north, but arrangements between the powers after 1889 precluded German colonization. In addition, Tonga's 1875 constitution stated that land could not be sold to foreigners, only leased for restricted periods following cabinet approval. As a result, the foreign pressures on land that dominated the political process in Samoa never appeared in Tonga.

Both countries adopted with enthusiasm different forms of Christianity purveyed by the first missionaries and both accorded high rank to church pastors. In each case missionaries were to find that they were cleverly used by the local populations within preexisting political structures (Garrett 1982). Samoa was a base for the Congregational Church while Tonga became a stronghold of the Wesleyan Methodists. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the leaders of the Methodist Church in Tonga became closely involved in Tongan politics. This had no parallel in Samoa. Tonga's King George Tupou I sought advice from many church advisors, but the key player became the Reverend Shirley Waldemar Baker (Garrett 1982; Rutherford 1971), culminating in the 1875 Tongan Constitution by which the State of Tonga was formally centralized as a kingdom. This process is described in Latukefu (1974, 1975). Minority churches were later established in both countries.

In Tonga the Catholic Church was adopted by the Ha'a Havea chiefs and became entangled in their local political rivalries. Their defeat by the Methodist chiefs in 1852 left a political legacy that festered for years. In both countries the Mormon Church has made significant gains, supported by extensive foreign funding during the twentieth century.

Internally Tonga underwent a bloody unification during the period from 1830 to 1852. George Tupou I was able to unify Tonga through his own political ambition, an ability to undertake mobile marine warfare, and access to captured guns and a few foreigners who could use them. Although there were competing claims to his formal position as the Tu'i

Kanokupolu, his conquests were of such effectiveness that his position was never again formally questioned. In turn he had no difficulty obtaining recognition as "King" from Europeans and others who were comfortable with that concept and who wished to obtain his protection.

George Tupou I embarked on preconstitutional reform through a series of edicts that reformed and codified traditional practice in 1839, 1850, and 1862. Then, in cooperation and collaboration with the church and foreign advisers, he announced the 1875 constitution. Debate continues about why there was such an innovative constitutional outcome: whether it was the influence of the king, or his entrepreneurial adviser; or a convenient and far-sighted marriage of the two forceful personalities involved; or a response to a domestic need, or to international pressures.

Whatever the cause, the development of a constitution in Tonga was presented as a *fait accompli* by the king, who won necessary noble, or chiefly, support for a more positive and active role for himself. He accomplished this by trading off the weakened power of many minor chiefs against the political dominance of a small number of important ones who became entrenched by obtaining hereditary titles under the new constitution. It would seem that the Tongan predisposition to authority made the country as a whole more receptive to accepting the foreign advice that led to this centralization.

It was also in the interest of the Methodist Church to promote unity through a leader who had adopted their denomination. This was achieved through a constitutional structure based on the Western principles of the Hawaiian model, which most easily fitted Tonga's rather authoritarian version of Polynesian culture. Had the Reverend Shirley Baker interacted with Tongan leaders fifty years earlier, when regional chiefs were stronger and more independent, a different and less centralized Tongan state might have emerged.

Tongans often claim that the triumph of the Tongan Constitution was that it allowed Tonga to fend off foreign interests and influences throughout the colonial period. As a result the Tongan way of life was protected. This argument ignores the fact that Tonga had already absorbed many aspects of a modern (or at least foreign) state in the new constitution. Among the most important of these aspects were: a legally adopted written constitution, the introduction of universal suffrage, hereditary estates and titles, an independent legal structure, a parliament, a national currency, restricted immigration, and land protection. The Tongan claim ignores also the fact that Tonga was forced to accept protectorate status under Britain from 1900 to 1970.

Tonga has been relatively tranquil from 1860 to the present. But this

was arguably a period of parochial introspection that left Tonga's governments with limited international experience. This characterization is particularly true following ratification of the Treaty of Friendship and Protection with Britain that Tonga was forced to accept in 1900. The treaty allowed a sometimes-intrusive British influence in foreign relations, defense, and economic matters, although the basis for this is unclear (Latukefu 1975).

In contrast to Tonga, Western Samoa suffered wars between competing chiefs until 1900, and no single chief became ascendant. Power in Western Samoa remained dissipated among four titles, the holders of which were basically content to live in competitive harmony. The titles were Malietoa (a title derived from the defeat of the invading Tongans), Tamasese, Tuimaleali'ifano and Mata'afa. Foreign settlers, however, were so uncomfortable with this arrangement that they constantly, tried either to impose or invent a "king" (So'o 1988). This foreign preference, coupled with sympathetic Samoan attitudes toward joint ownership of titles, resulted in a joint "kingship" in 1874 between Malietoa Laupepa and Tupua Pulepule.

Then, either unable to withstand or indifferent to the jockeying among groups of foreign residents from the 1830s to 1962, Western Samoa found itself with colonial status. Colonial pressure grew out of commercial interests, particularly the desire to protect land that had been developed for copra plantations by German companies. A need to protect nationals flowed from this investment. The western portion of the Samoan Islands group was under German rule (1900-1914), then was governed by New Zealand (1914-1944), followed by a United Nations mandate (1945-1961). Finally, Western Samoa became independent in 1962. So while Tonga maintained its unity and regarded itself as independent, Western Samoa was fragmented internally and the only central authority was a colonial one.

In Western Samoa the church was much less influential in domestic politics. Whatever its predisposition elsewhere, the Congregational Church in Western Samoa devolved authority more than the Methodist Church in Tonga, and it did not intervene on behalf of a central government and did not encourage the adoption of foreign concepts of government that were introduced by the colonizing powers. In Western Samoa, the political system did not provide a central authority with which a church could align itself.

Village life in Western Samoa continued to be resilient in the face of changes introduced by central government. Local communities remained the source of authority for Western Samoans through to and

beyond the time when a written constitution was adopted. So, in Western Samoa to the present, villagers still meet in the *fono* to discuss the selection of their leaders. Except in the parliamentary arena, where universal suffrage has been introduced, the process remains relatively fluid. The multitude of nuances that make a leadership choice appropriate or otherwise can be brought into play. These procedures have not been codified and some argue that the introduction of formal processes, including the Land and Titles Court, has made it more difficult to resolve disputes because positions are argued more formally and go on the public record (Meleisea 1987a).

Undoubtedly, pressure for centralization was present in both countries from the 1830s onward. But in Western Samoa centralization never took root. It was probably in the commercial settlers' and half-castes' interests to support a strong centralized government in the hands of Samoans if they could depend on it for support; otherwise they would prefer a rather diffuse and powerless one that fostered continuity of Samoa's village-based consultative government system. It seems the Samoans thought so too. As a result, during the colonial period Western Samoa experienced much stronger foreign political and commercial influences than Tonga. These included: the growth of a much larger, influential half-caste community that developed from relations among Samoans, merchants, and contract laborers; the emergence and demise of an independence movement (the Mau); and negotiations with both the New Zealand administration and the United Nations over a constitution for independence.

During this active period, when society and government was changing and evolving in Western Samoa, Tonga's foreign affairs and some aspects of internal administration were managed by Britain. Latukefu's accounts of Tongan history describe a period of introversion (1974, 1975), when effort was consumed in domestic disputes over finance, church management, and title succession.

The Tongan and Western Samoan Constitutions

Tonga's constitution was handed down in 1875, Western Samoa's adopted in 1962. Over the space of ninety years, two constitutions emerged in quite different historical circumstances. Both bridged the gap between a need for representative constitutional government and a traditional system where social rank carried authority. The two constitutions work out compromises in different ways.

Tonga's constitution introduced a hereditary head of state of the kind

associated with established constitutional monarchies (although based on Hawaiian precedents), so Tonga's is one of the most recently established constitutional monarchies in the world, despite claims that the chiefly line can be traced much further back. Headship of state in Tonga is determined by hereditary claim on the male side. Paradoxically, it came into being at a time of emerging and spreading republicanism in the world as a whole.

In contrast, Western Samoa's 1962 constitution set up a headship of state with no clear succession rules, largely because conference delegates could not agree on a succession mechanism. Headship was first held by the *fautua* (advisers), Tupua Tamasese and Malietoa. Tupua died in 1963, and the Head of State is now Malietoa. In the future the Western Samoan constitution allows the Head of State to be selected by an undefined procedure of the Legislative Assembly. This would allow the election of a paramount chief by a "traditional" process in the parliament, which would mirror the older process of the village *fono.* Meleisea notes that the Samoan constitution was "written in a spirit which assumed that all the contradictions . . . would be solved by the the next generation" (1987a:211).

Tonga and Western Samoa each adopted a unicameral legislature, reflecting the smallness of the countries and a relatively simple approach to representation. However, the procedure in each for choosing a prime minister and cabinet is quite different. In Tonga these choices are in the hands of the monarch, while in Western Samoa the prime minister is appointed by the Head of State from among members of the legislature. The member who commands the support of the *fono* is chosen. Perhaps as a result of a need for support within the legislature, and a complex of other factors (So'o 1988), Western Samoa developed aspects of a party system that now complement other processes in the selection of the prime minister. This never developed in Tonga where the king still chooses the prime minister, who need not be from among elected parliamentarians. In Tonga today the prerogative of the king in both parliamentary and traditional senses is being questioned by a more educated electorate. In Western Samoa the opposite problem is emerging, that of how to find suitable positions and responsibilities for paramount chiefs who may be denied either traditional or formal roles by a more democratic process.

The two constitutions confronted the issues of representation and respect for chiefly rank in different ways. In the Tongan model the Legislative Assembly has two sets of members other than the cabinet members chosen by the king. One set is the peoples' representatives elected

by the commoners on the basis of universal suffrage. The second set is the nobles' representatives elected by the thirty-three hereditary title-holders. The numbers in each group have varied throughout Tonga's constitutional period and are currently equal. Thus both electors and their representatives are stratified by rank. The strengths and weaknesses of this approach have been discussed elsewhere (Hills 1991b). In Western Samoa the only voters under the original constitution were the *matai.* The fact that the franchise was restricted has to be seen in context, especially that *matai* were elected after wide-ranging debate in the *aiga* (an extended kinship group). So the choice itself was a two-stage process, each stage allowing a different rank to play a role in selection, with the *aiga* delegating responsibility to its *matai.* The Tongan structure with its basis in universal suffrage may seem more modern than the Samoan model, but it is less fluid: Half the representatives are elected by only thirty-three nobles who, combined with government ministers, control the majority in the Legislative Assembly. This control has recently become an issue (Hills 1991a).

In other aspects the constitutions are similar. Both set the modern state within a framework of Christian principles, and their general constitutional framework is similar to that of many other countries that obtained independence in the 1960s (Levine 1983). Perhaps because Western Samoa was governed under a United Nations mandate, which followed a turbulent colonial history, it became the first Pacific island country to obtain full independence, in 1962.

Although Tonga and Western Samoa obtained their constitutions eighty-seven years apart, following quite different colonial histories and separated by a time span during which attitudes to colonialism changed dramatically, the two constitutions were fundamentally similar in that the structure of the legislature and representation within it was a compromise between chiefly leadership and representational democracy.

Contemporary Constitutional Challenges

The constitutional compromises in both Western Samoa and Tonga have been tested during the last ten years in the face of increased public concern for even greater participation in government, combined with evidence suggesting the abuse of power by vested interests.

In Western Samoa, challenges arose during the period when only *matai* could vote after new *matai* titles were created with no function other than to create additional votes for candidates in parliamentary elections (the *matai palota*). The abuse of the *matai* system was the

basis of demands for universal suffrage that developed in the late 1980s. In Tonga, the issue of representation arose from the inability of the peoples' representatives in parliament to bring ministers to account for what were seen as unreasonable claims on public funds for overtime and overseas travel allowances.

In both cases the demands of a few individuals quickly gained sympathy from an emerging well-educated middle class, frequently with overseas education and experience, who wanted to participate more fully in the processes of government. These critics of Polynesian politics saw traditional processes as slow and inefficient, and were concerned about their personal and economic future in countries where they perceived the majority of policy decisions lay with a relatively less-educated, elderly chiefly group who appeared to have a vested interest in holding onto the power vested in them by the early constitutions.

Reform of the Tongan constitution can be effected only through parliamentary amendment. But this is only possible with the king's acquiesence. In Western Samoa, reform can be obtained through general referendum. The country has shown itself to be more adaptable than Tonga: Its 1990 referendum on universal suffrage changed the voting system radically when it became clear that *matai* titles were being abused. Meleisea (1987a) and So'o (1988) have noted that this abuse was a threat to Samoan tradition as well as to the political system, and the situation is now rectified. There is, paradoxically, evidence that reform took place because conservative voters, who did not want change, abstained from voting in the referendum.

Meanwhile, Tonga has a continuing problem over the balance of representation between commoners and nobles in its parliament and the role of the monarchy, Reform of Tonga's parliamentary structure is almost impossible because a combination of government ministers and nobles' representatives can always outvote the nine peoples' representatives who have been seeking change. A solution can take several forms; although one is parliamentary reform through constitutional amendment, attitudes among many current members seem to make this relatively easy route quite impossible (Hills 1991a). In addition, the inequality of representation can only get worse as the overall population grows while the number of hereditary titles is fixed. In the interim, in the face of a clearly unsatisfactory situation, Tonga is undergoing a period of social tension that unhappily is undermining its reputation for social justice and stability. Tongan observers who support reform are divided between those who would prefer to use the parliamentary system and those who feel that they must appeal directly to the king. Cer-

tain of the current parliamentarians and ministers are perceived to have vested interests, and the reformers in the parliament have little real power (*Matangi Tonga* 1992).

Tonga also faces the possible introduction of political parties. It is said that Tonga is too small to need parties and that the reciprocity of the social system makes them unnecessary. However, since the 1990 Tonga general election and most recently under pressure from increasingly active pressure groups, parliamentarians, government ministers, and the churches have discussed forming political parties both for and against the government. Interestingly, in the Tongan case, if any parties were formed now they would more likely be based on a platform (either of constitutional reform or opposition to it) than as a reflection of kin relationships. However, the most radical reformist proposals of ʻAkilisi Pohiva, Vili Fukofuka, and Futa Helu seem more likely to split reformist parliamentarians than unite them.

The churches, which have commoner leadership, have always played a significant role in domestic Tongan politics and both sides are seeking their support. Although outspoken churchmen have supported calls for reform of parliamentary representation, the government has been looking for a conservative alliance with the churches under the traditional Tongan banner of "Church and State," perhaps with a view to initiating a pro-government party.

Western Samoa had no political parties in its early years of independence. They emerged in the 1970s and 1980s under the leadership of first Vaʻai Kolone, then Tupuola Efi, then Tofilau Eti. However, while labels as "parties" convey an air of modernity, they have not been platforms for the presentation of coherent policies (although this may be changing). Rather they have been a mechanism for welding together, in a more formal and modern way, the kinship and interest groups related to a particular leader.

Tonga's capacity to live comfortably with a centralized government remains strong, but the other face of centralization is a tendency to turn to oppression, as illustrated by comments from Tonga's police minister about reintroducing capital punishment for treason (*Matangi Tonga* 1991). This facet of political activity has happily been absent from Western Samoa. So Tonga has been uncomfortable adjusting to pressures for change, in contrast to the response in Western Samoa in 1990.

Despite the absence of political parties, popular domestic movements, both organized and spontaneous, have grown in Tonga since 1975. There are embryonic unionlike organizations in Tonga among teachers and nurses. For example, in 1988 science teachers were able to

organize strong public protest against an American group that proposed building a toxic-waste incinerator. Similarly, in 1991 the peoples' representatives in the parliament, together with church leaders, led an unprecedented public demonstration against the sale of Tongan passports to foreigners. Tonga has not experienced anything of the kind Western Samoa saw in the Mau between 1926 and 1930. The Mau was a political independence movement, of a kind unnecessary in Tonga where the British presence was low-key: More recently in Western Samoa, unions have been able to create disruption through organized strike activity, such as by the public service in 1981 and by nurses in 1989. These activities in both Western Samoa and Tonga show that there is growing awareness of the value and use of public pressure out.. side traditional consultation processes when those processes have not responded appropriately to new challenges.

Both Western Samoa and Tonga now have economies of the kind described as "migration, remittance, aid, and bureaucracy" based (MIRAB) (Bertram and Watters 1985; Watters 1987). Their terms of trade in agricultural products have become depressed and their range of alternative exports is limited. Accurate figures are hard to come by, but both countries have 40 to 50 percent of their populations living overseas and remitting what amounts to some 30 percent of their gross domestic product (Ahlburg 1991). Depressed economic conditions caused by chronically low growth rates lead to ever greater pressure for out-migration, which in turn leads to foreign experience and overseas education. Returned migrants are the base for much political dissatisfaction, so challenges to tradition will continue as long as economic conditions lead to the out-migration of citizens who hope to return home eventually.

In both countries aid has become an important source of public finance, and governments are becoming increasingly dependent on it, Western Samoa and Tonga both have to find ways of adjusting to growing consumer expectations. Neither is being forced to make difficult economic choices about long-term public investment because there is no shortage of investment capital, now largely provided through international aid arrangements. However, national financial management will become more and more critical as each country integrates into the international economy, particularly if migration regulations are tightened or if aid flows decrease as the Pacific competes with growing needs in Eastern Europe.

In these circumstances government will have to be efficient and honest if it is to receive the endorsement of those governed. The mix of tra-

ditional and parliamentary arrangements, which delegates authority to a chiefly group, may not be able to withstand the demands for transparency and accountability the contemporary world expects.

Conclusions

Samoa and Tonga began the early nineteenth century with similar social and political conditions. Since 1852 Tonga has been relatively stable and isolated, while Western Samoa has been buffeted by colonialism. In constitutional arrangements, each tried to adapt representational government to its own traditions and has found that the compromise with chiefly authority has worked only partially. In the late 1980s both began to face strains that will require adaptive responses. So far, by introducing universal suffrage, Samoa has tackled the challenges more successfully than Tonga.

Tonga accepted the features of the modern state earlier, absorbing the central tenets of representational parliamentary government in 1875. Tonga adopted a centralized and relatively authoritarian government easily, both because the nation was united militarily and because Tongan chiefs were more authoritarian than Samoan *matai.* This form of government laid the foundation for one hundred years of stability but was a distortion of Polynesian traditions that Tongans themselves now seem unwilling to accept.

Both Samoan and Tongan societies show respect for social rank, but in Western Samoa rank has not become as central to government as in Tonga. Tonga grasped an early opportunity to integrate rank into a nineteenth-century constitution. Some aspects of that constitution, including hereditary titles and the land-holding system, have dated rapidly and today appear to be anachronisms. Tonga's early adoption of these foreign elements is now causing difficulty in reforming them to meet new political challenges.

In Tonga Polynesian adaptability disappeared with the introduction of hereditary titles. The system lost its fluidity, and an important political dimension disappeared from local life. More recently, as the central government in Tonga has taken over the judicial and welfare functions that were once in the hands of chiefs, the chiefs have become even more distanced from their traditional roles. In modern Tonga nobles have to make an explicit effort to maintain a traditional relationship to their people. A few have succeeded: An example is the king's son, 'Ulukalala Lavaka-'Ata, who has returned to live in one of his estates.

In Western Samoa problems of maintaining the traditional chiefly

functions appeared when new *matai* titles were created for parliamentary purposes. This difficulty has now been overcome with the change to universal suffrage. So Western Samoa, with its more varied colonial history and diffuse leadership pattern, has emerged as more adaptable than Tonga in the face of modern political challenges.

Meleisea (1987a) makes an interesting point about Samoan government, that Euro-American thinking assumes that centralization of government is synonymous with "modern" government. As a result, many occidental writers have assumed that Tongan government is more modern than Samoan. In addition, the Tongan system of government is popularly seen as classically Polynesian, because it emphasizes authority and rank relationships in a way foreigners can understand. In contrast, So'o (1988) claims that in the 1940s Western Samoans were unconvinced of any need to change their village-based form of government. This comparative study suggests that the Western Samoan decentralized system has maintained Polynesian principles more truly and now demonstrates greater capacity to adapt constitutionally.

Each nation now faces challenges that flow from its history. In Western Samoa there remains a need to identify organization and authority, in Tonga the reverse--the need is to to allow the expression and adoption of dissenting views.

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