CHANGING CONTOURS OF KINSHIP:
THE IMPACTS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
ON KINSHIP ORGANIZATION IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

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The incorporation of microstates into the capitalist world-system sets the stage for profound transformations of kinship organization. This article argues that, while ideologies of kinship may remain largely intact, the actual organization of kinship is changing. It explores the roles of social, demographic, political, and economic factors in the transformation of the structure of kinship and family in the South Pacific in the period since continuous contact with the West commenced some 170 years ago. The case of Western Samoa is offered as an example of the process of change that is occurring at varying rates throughout Pacific Island societies.

SAMOAN CULTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION have been extensively described, analyzed and debated by scholars since the mid-1800s, and, as a consequence, Samoa is one of the most extensively documented societies in the southwest Pacific region (Taylor 1965; Caton 1994).[1] Academic and popular interest in Samoan society has ensured that there are accounts, albeit of varying quality, of changes in social organization since the onset of European contact.[2] This article draws on that literature to outline one aspect of that change, the impact of incorporation into the capitalist world-system (Wallerstein 1974, 1983) on the structure and organization of Samoan kinship. Its central argument is that while, after 170 years of contact with the European world, an ideology of kinship remains a central element of Samoan culture, incorporation into the capitalist world-system has produced significant shifts in the way in which kinship is organized.

In one sense the impact of incorporation on the organization of kinship in Samoa is unique, and this account should be regarded as the study of a particular case. However, Samoan society shares sociocultural and economic features with and is exposed to the same or very similar economic and political forces as other small, island Polynesian societies within the region. Processes that have occurred in Samoa, outlined below, can be seen to varying degrees elsewhere in the southwest Pacific. This account, then, with appropriate caution, can be read as an illustration of the processes by which Pacific Island societies have been incorporated into the capitalist world-system and of the consequences of those processes for the social organization of small island Pacific societies.

Samoa: A Brief History

The Samoan archipelago was settled around thirty-five hundred years ago by the Polynesian descendants of voyagers who had moved from Southeast Asia into the Pacific some five thousand years ago (Meleisea and Schoeffel-Meleisea 1987). Apart from occasional contact with Tongans and Fijians (Tuimaleali'ifano 1990), the Samoan population lived in relative isolation until the eighteenth century, when Europeans began to visit the archipelago. Until that time Samoa was a single-language-and-culture region within which regular visiting and trade occurred.[3]

Samoa's contact with the world-system commenced when explorers started to visit the Pacific. The Dutch navigator Roggeveen sighted the archipelago in 1722 but did not land or trade with the Samoans.[4] He was followed by two French navigators: Bougainville, who visited the Samoas in 1768 and named them the Isles of Navigators, and La Pérouse, who called in Tutuila in 1787. An early misunderstanding between Samoans in Tutuila and La Pérouse's crew, which resulted in the death of a scientist and eleven marines, won Samoa a reputation among mariners as an inhospitable port. Apart from the HMS *Pandora,* which visited the islands in 1791 in search of the *Bounty* mutineers, few Europeans visited the group until early in the nineteenth century.

European settlement in Samoa commenced on a small scale when beachcombers, deserters, and even fugitives from justice started to arrive in the early 1800s, and on a larger scale with missionary activity in 1830 and commercial activity shortly thereafter. In 1899, as part of a rationalization of European interests in the Pacific, the Samoas were divided into an eastern and a western group. The former became, and remains, an unincorporated territory of the United States. The latter became a German possession between 1900 and 1914, a League of Nations mandate between the world wars, and a United Nations Trust Territory between World War II and the assump-

tion of independence in 1962.⁵ Throughout recent history, Samoans have always been the largest ethnic group in Samoa, and today over 95 percent of the population of 170,000 is of Samoan descent.

Kinship in Pre-European Society

Until European contact, kinship was the central principle of Samoan social organization; economic, political, and religious life was organized around an elaborate system of kinship (Gilson 1970:29–64; Turner 1983:172–183).

The basic kin groups, or *aiga,* were nonlocalized cognatic corporations (Gilson 1970:29); for Samoans these groups consisted of all people who were bound by kinship to the land and the chiefly title *o e uma e tau ile suafa ma le fanua.* The title was a chiefly name associated with a particular village and held for life by a male. The holder of the title was chosen by the incumbent holder in consultation with senior members of the *aiga* before his death. Its significance derived from the relationship between a family's title and its resources. As O'Meara has noted, "Corporate extended families, called *ʻaiga,* owned nearly all residential and agricultural land, as well as houses, canoes and other resources. . . . Authority, or *pule,* over the use of the corporate family's lands and other resources . . . was vested in a particular *matai* name, or title, which was an office specific to that family" (1995:110).

The nucleus of a kin group comprised a series of related *pui aiga,* or domestic units, numbering ten to twelve persons, which resided in a village and worked nearby agricultural land vested in the *matai,*⁶ or chief, under whose authority members resided.⁷ The *matai* was bound to protect the autonomy of the *aiga* that he headed, to advance its interests, and to extend its prestige and influence by investing its human and physical capital in sociopolitical activity. His performance in each of these areas was monitored by members. Some members of the *aiga* resided outside of the village with their affines' *aiga* but retained the right to return, to exercise land rights, and to be consulted on certain central matters such as title succession—hence the term for the maximal kin grouping, *aiga potopoto,* which means "the family assembled."

Kinship was central to social organization because it was the basis of access to land and other resources and of the social relations of production (Meleisea 1987). Individuals derived their rights to a house site, agricultural land, and marine resources through establishing membership in kin groups.⁸ Individuals derived their right to call on the labor of others for certain types of economic and ceremonial activity through kinship. Individuals also derived social identity, social location, the right to protection by the group, and eligibility to succeed to chiefly titles from membership in the *aiga.*

In return for these rights, individuals were bound to serve, or *tautua,* their *matai* and the *aiga.* Service generally entailed placing some part of their primary production and labor at the disposal of the family's *matai,* who was free to distribute it within or use it on behalf of the *aiga.* This labor and production was generally used in activities designed to maintain the integrity of the *aiga,* such as warfare, or to increase its sociopolitical status, such as gift giving, strategic marriages (Moyle 1984:254–255), and the hosting of visits, *malaga,* by other families or villages (ibid.:251–254).

All Samoans inherited membership rights in their mothers' parents' and fathers' parents' *aiga* at birth and were free to exercise these rights throughout their lives. At various times individuals could, and did, move from one of these *aiga* to another as their needs changed and opportunities arose. Choices were usually the consequence of decisions about resources and leadership available in and the benefits of association with various *aiga* with whom an individual had connections.

Where an *aiga* had access to plentiful or fertile land, its numbers usually grew, as people with rights to reside on its land exercised these rights. Conversely, those families with limited or poor land were unable to support large populations, and their numbers fell as individuals were forced to exercise rights to reside with *aiga* possessing more resources. As a consequence, *aiga* were routinely in a state of flux as individuals exercised their rights in different *aiga* over time (Gilson 1970:31). While resources were clearly significant, they were not the sole determinant of a group's size or influence.

Effective leadership could also result in the growth in size and influence of an *aiga* and its *matai.* Those who were entitled to claim membership chose to attach themselves to effectively led groups and benefited by association with them. As incoming members took up residence and developed plantations, they contributed to growth of resources at the disposal of the group and indirectly to its influence. Conversely, ineffective leadership could result in declines in size and influence of an *aiga. Matai* typically nominated their successors, in addresses known as *mavaega,* shortly before death and in the presence of their families. *Aiga* were bound by these directives but were, technically at least, free to dismiss *matai* and elect new ones when poor performance resulted in loss of prestige or jeopardized a group's autonomy.[9]

Villages, or *nu'u,* comprised a series of often related *aiga.* They resided under the authority of a *fono matai,* or council of chiefs, comprising the *matai* of all of the families in the village. The *fono* exercised eminent domain over village lands, which generally consisted of territory running from mountain peaks in the interior through forest land, agricultural land, and

villages, to the fringing reefs. Families cultivated designated areas of the village land, and *matai* assigned rights to use a family's agricultural land and house sites to members of the family and their spouses who agreed to reside in the village and to serve the *matai* and the village. The use rights assigned in this process to individuals lapsed at death, and control of the land was returned to and reassigned by the *matai.*

The *fono* managed the social, political, and economic affairs of the village and acted where necessary to resolve disputes within village boundaries and with neighboring villages. Disputes typically involved village boundaries, boundaries between families, and theft from plantations. The relative importance and influence of various *aiga* within the village varied over time with size, quality of leadership, and the use made of productive resources. At any given time families' relative importance was indicated in the ceremonial order of precedence or *fa'alupega* (Krämer 1994:660).

Districts, or *itu malo,* consisted in turn of groups of eight to ten villages that would occasionally agree to unite, under the high chief of a district, usually in defense of the district's or a member village's territory or honor when threatened by another village or district (Turner 1983). A district's cooperation and authority was confined to these occasions; at other times villages were autonomous social and political entities.[10]

Until evangelization and colonization commenced, kinship was the foundation of all social, political, and economic organization. It lay at the base of the economic, political, and religious spheres of life and defined the rights and obligations of all individuals and the groups in which these rights were exercised. The Samoan historian Meleisea has explained the relationship as follows: "The foundation of the Samoan economy and the *fa'a Samoa* [Samoan worldview and social organization] was subsistence agriculture based on descent group tenure and ownership of land, and for social and political institutions to have changed, the system of tenure would have had to change. The Samoan system made economic individualism impossible" (1987:18). Any activity that disturbed economic, political, or religious organization was bound to have an impact on the organization of kinship. European contact was to influence all three areas of Samoan life.

European Contact

The Runaways

Samoa's incorporation into the world-system commenced toward the end of the eighteenth century with the settlement of small numbers of beach-

combers, runaway sailors, and escaped convicts.[11] These people were, how-
ever, largely dependent on the Samoans for protection and survival and, as a
consequence, had limited impact on Samoan social organization. In fact,
their reception and the probability of their finding protection were influ-
enced by their value to the Samoans. Thus boat builders and those with a
knowledge of trade, firearms, and military strategy were often pressed into
the service of chiefs who sought to extend their political and military in-
fluence within Samoa.

The Missions

Missionary activity commenced in earnest in 1830 with the arrival of
the Reverend John Williams and eight Tahitian teachers of the London Mis-
sionary Society.[12] Conversion of the Samoan population to Christianity
followed relatively quickly and smoothly.[13] The promotion of Christian doc-
trine and practices constituted a watershed in Samoan cultural history. The
idea that the adoption of the new religion signified a break with the "times
of darkness," *aso o le pouliuli,* and the commencement of the time of
enlightenment, *aso o le malamalama,* was promoted initially by missionaries
to establish the importance of conversion but was increasingly accepted by
the Samoans themselves. Although the missions initially promoted religious
doctrines and practices, they soon began to promote a series of secular ideas
and practices such as the sanctity of private property and the value of "in-
dustry." These secular ideas gained varying degrees of acceptance from
Samoans because of their association with the mission.

    Missionaries had mixed feelings about the chieftaincy and the nature and
extent of its authority over the people (Gilson 1970:75). Despite their reser-
vations they chose not to interfere with the organization or leadership of
Samoan kin groups for reasons of expediency. Indeed, the success of their
mission was dependent on the continued authority of *matai* who heard the
mission teachings and promoted conversion to the new religion among their
followers. Gilson notes: "Williams was probably guided more by consider-
ations of expediency than was any other London Missionary Society mis-
sionary of his time. Certainly, no one placed a higher value on the patronage
of chiefs . . . nor did any display greater confidence in being able to gain it
and use it to advantage. . . . In the vanguard of the mission, he sought to
make the most spectacular first impression, that mass conversion might occur
in the shortest possible time" (1970:75).

    This strategy led to conversions of entire families or *aiga* and produced
large numbers of converts in the Samoas in a relatively short time. The pro-
cess meant also that families were not usually split by conversion, since all

were converted on the instructions of recognized leaders at once and to a single religion. The fragmentation of *aiga* and the disruption of their social organization, which had followed conversion elsewhere in the Pacific, did not occur to the same extent in the Samoas.

Missionaries did, however, challenge those Samoan religious beliefs that connected families' fates with the activities of a number of "village and household gods" (Turner 1983:23–77; Stair 1983:210–241).[14] These gods, usually embodied in animals, were supposed to guide and protect families from their enemies. Missionaries required Samoan converts to renounce their family gods, but even in this area their efforts were not as heavy-handed as was the case in Tahiti earlier. John Williams reported in his journal that he had been advised by a Samoan chief, Faueā, who accompanied him to Samoa on his first visit, to avoid "precipitate actions" that might alienate the Samoans, and the missionaries did not see the Samoans' religion to represent as serious a challenge to Christianity as had the religions of eastern Polynesia (Gilson 1970:73–74).

Indeed, as Turner noted, "At one time it was supposed that Samoa was destitute of any kind of religion and . . . the people were called 'the *godless* Samoans' " (1983:16–17). Though the gods that dominated Samoan life were not considered threatening, because, as Stair noted, "they have no idols or teraphim, neither were they accustomed to offer human sacrifices to their idols," the Samoans "were burdened with superstitions which were most oppressive and exacting" (1983:210), and they had to be "freed" from these beliefs. The remedy involved persuading Samoans to the belief that one god rather than many gods controlled their families' destinies (Gilson 1970:73–74). While the new belief transformed the exact nature of the connection between families and the supernatural, it left intact a relationship between families and the supernatural realm that could be invoked to guide and protect them. Thus, over time, families abandoned the protection of a Samoan god in favor of that of the omnipresent and omniscient god of the missionaries.

Missionaries, from John Williams on, also sought, for various reasons, to reduce the level of hostility between villages and districts.[15] Williams, for instance, was concerned not solely with the biblical injunction to peace, love, and forgiveness, but also with the need to protect "his people" and their property. He sought to have the energy Samoans devoted to war diverted into religious activity. The effort was partly successful early on, but later civil war broke out again among various chiefly families and continued until the late nineteenth century (Gilson 1970; Meleisea and Schoeffel-Meleisea 1987).[16] Renewed attempts by missionaries and civil authorities to promote peace and a growing disillusion with war among Samoans led to the creation

of new mechanisms for resolution of disputes and of venues for competition within and between chiefly families.

In one important respect missionary activity was to have an impact on the rationale that underpinned traditional economic organization. The various mission societies sought to take their message to the islands that lay to the west of Samoa as part of a longer-term evangelism project. This extension of missionary activity stretched the resources available from traditional supporters in Britain, and the mission looked for contributions from those who had benefited from the missionary presence. These contributions took the form of personnel and financial support. From 1846 on Samoan teachers and pastors played a significant role in the evangelization of the western Pacific, but it is the financial contribution to the missions' activity that is of interest in this context.

Missionaries encouraged Samoans to raise contributions for the advancement of the mission by creating surpluses of crops that could be sold to finance missionary activity. These collections were organized by Samoan laity according to Samoan custom, and they pitted family against family and village against village in a competition to donate the most to the mission and, by implication, to demonstrate the greatest commitment to the faith (Gilson 1970:100, 130–135). Families competed within the villages to outgive one another. Villages then competed to become the most generous village in mission meetings that were held in each district in May of each year and that became known as the *me*.

In one respect the mission meetings, or *me*, can be seen simply as a revival of intervillage competition organized by Samoans in support of Christian missionary activity, continuing a tradition of intervillage and interdistrict rivalry that had been suppressed to some degree by the missions' discouragement of warfare. These mission meetings were, however, the first occasion on which Samoans had been encouraged to produce significant surpluses of crops for sale for cash in a world commodity market and for reasons unconnected with traditional interests and practices. Although the *me* were the most obvious examples of mission-induced production of surpluses, the more general requirements of participation in religious activity and a desire to demonstrate families' commitment to their faith through gifts to their pastors meant that the routine production of agricultural surpluses for sale in a market became a more general practice.

In these respects then, missionary activity had an early impact on the Samoan worldview and on the organization of families. This impact was, however, less profound than the effects that followed the onset of commercial activity and that posed challenges to central tenets of kinship ideology.

Commerce and Kinship

The commercial activities that became established in Samoa were, ironically, a by-product of missionary activity. Missions still had to raise funds in Britain, and to do so they had to return periodically and appeal for funds. Support was sought from both congregations and corporate "sponsors" by appealing to somewhat different motives in each case.

In the case of corporate sponsors, the missions had to argue that missionary activity indirectly served the longer-term interests of commerce. Gilson, for instance, has described how John Williams obtained funds from the City Corporation of London:

> His "prospectus" had only recently appeared as the final chapter of his book, *Missionary Enterprises,* in which he had confidently asserted that the evangelist, by taming and sophisticating the savage, was creating the conditions most essential to commercial progress in the Pacific. Indeed, the commercial interests of mankind had *never* been served more effectively, he had written, than by the introduction of the Christianity among the heathen. Surely, then, the merchant and the shipowner would want to embrace the mission cause. (1970:138)

In this case the aldermen gave Williams £500 and expressed confidence in receiving "an ample return," but a more general consequence of these periodic assurances of the safety of Samoa, and the Pacific more generally, was to alert European capitalists to the possibilities of extending commerce into the Pacific and exploiting opportunities there.

In the Samoan case commercial interests sought to establish plantations initially to grow copra in the 1840s and later to grow cotton as the Civil War disrupted American cotton production and drove prices up. Settlers, hoping to acquire cheap land and labor, flocked to Samoa to establish commercial plantations (O'Meara 1995). A formal colonial presence commenced in the 1850s with the appointment of consuls to represent the interests of settlers from Britain, Germany, and the United States (Gilson 1970). These forces were to have a significant influence on the organization of kinship, because they introduced alternative ways of organizing social, political, and economic relations. Not all such relations were embraced, but all challenged the kinship ideology that underpinned social relations in precontact Samoa.

The linkages between kinship and land tenure were challenged early, as settlers arrived to establish plantations. Nervous of leasing land in the absence

of a system of land title registration, settlers sought to persuade Samoans to sell them land with freehold title. By the mid-1860s a few thousand acres, mainly on the north side of Upolu, had been sold to Europeans for residential and agricultural purposes (Gilson 1970:271–290), and pressure was building for more alienation to take advantage of the high demand and prices for cotton. By 1889, when land sales were banned by a tripartite commission, land speculation had resulted in claims that covered twice the land area of the entire archipelago (O'Meara 1995:115). These sales and other alienations had resulted in the commodification of a resource that formerly had only use value and had created a market in land. This commodification in turn raised fundamental questions about kinship and, more specifically, about the relations among a *matai,* an *aiga,* and the lands to which they were bound.

First, were there limits to chiefs' powers to assign land use rights? Samoans had acknowledged a chief's power to assign rights, but these rights were generally conferred for an individual's lifetime or until such time as an individual committed an offense that entitled the *aiga* to expel the individual and to revoke his or her land rights and reassign them. All rights to use land lapsed at death, when the land was returned to the *aiga* and the *matai,* who could then reassign them. Did chiefs have the power to assign anyone rights permanently?

Second, to whom was a *matai* entitled to sell or otherwise alienate land? While most Samoans acknowledged a chief's right, or *pule,* to assign rights of usufruct to members of the *aiga,* and indeed to non-kin who had served the *aiga,* could such rights be extended to assign rights to non-kin who had not served and were unlikely ever to serve the family? In rare cases, alienations of land occurred within Samoan contexts such as payments for the right to live (O'Meara 1995:113), but here too these exceptional events occurred with relations explained and sanctioned in Samoan terms. This new situation raised the question of whether a *matai* was in fact a manager or an owner of kin-group land. If alienation was possible, which chiefs needed to be consulted or to agree to alienation in any given case?

Finally, and perhaps most significant, the alienation of small amounts of land to settlers and the creation of freehold title opened the possibility of another category of rights and relationships that derived not from kinship, but from ownership and control of private property.

The existence of commercial plantations gave rise to a second set of challenges to the kinship ideology. Settlers, unable to provide all of the labor required to work their plantations, sought to hire Samoans as wageworkers. Samoans were generally reluctant to work for wages and did so only when they needed cash for specific purposes, but the existence of a labor market transformed for all time the traditional bases of authority and rights to ser-

vice. Samoans' own limited experience of wage labor and contact with in-
dentured Melanesian and Chinese plantation workers raised another set of
issues about the nature and bases of authority and power that previously had
been embedded in kinship and explained by an ideology of kinship.

Kinship was clearly not the only basis for authority and power. The pos-
session of private capital created another basis for authority and for demand-
ing and receiving compliance from other people. Nor, it became clear, was
kinship the only basis for service, or *tautua*. The contrasts in production and
the use of labor within Samoan villages and on plantations were stark. The
possession of land and cash with which to purchase labor permitted one to
purchase service and obedience from unrelated persons and to use it in the
pursuit of individual rather than group ends. Access to capital, furthermore,
permitted individuals to expropriate all produce and to retain any profits
from its sale without any obligation to redistribute either among those who
had contributed to their creation. Both of these discoveries raised funda-
mental questions about the centrality of kinship.

The recruitment of Samoans to the crews of whaling and trading ships
and the creation of labor barracks on commercial plantations, in which unre-
lated people lived together under the authority of unrelated people and
without chiefs, presented alternative models of coresidence and coexistence,
and another challenge to the assumption that kinship was the only basis for
the organization of human social activity. Specifically, it demonstrated alter-
native bases of hierarchy and raised questions about the inevitability of a
connection among kinship, social status, and control.

Early in the twentieth century more pressure was placed on the Samoan
kinship ideology by the creation of both missionary and state formal-educa-
tion systems. Both drew heavily on curricula and teaching materials created
in metropolitan nations. Samoans valued success in formal education and
embraced and promoted it. As a consequence, significant parts of the popu-
lation were exposed to teaching material that contained alternative discourses
and images of kinship organization. In these images, families were typically
small and often apparently isolated; kinship was less significant in social orga-
nization, and constellations of values were both implicitly and explicitly in-
dividualistic rather than communitarian. Possibly because these images
were most apparent to children, who in a gerontocracy have little power,
their immediate impact on the organization of Samoan society was limited.

Later in the century other phenomena, including the presence of U.S.
troops during World War II, travel, and mass media, were to give these alter-
native images much wider currency. The introduction of a private press,[17]
the growth and popularity of cinema, U.S. television broadcasts from Amer-
ican Samoa,[18] videotapes, and most recently the television broadcasts from

New Zealand on the state's television system, Televise Samoa, have all contributed to a much wider awareness by adults of a European, or *palagi*, lifestyle and worldview in which kinship is much less significant and very different in character.

The Transformation of Kinship in Independent Samoa

Despite exposure to these alternatives, kinship remained, for most Samoans in Samoa at least, the preferred basis of social organization when, after 120 years of contact with the West, independence was first formally discussed. When Western Samoa prepared for constitutional independence in the late 1950s, representatives of the Constitutional Commission visited every village in Samoa to establish what people wanted embodied in the constitution (Davidson 1967). There was significant support for the retention of Samoan custom and tradition. More specifically, people voiced support for a system of land tenure based on kinship, a system of local government based on the village and run by the *fono matai*, the creation of a system of national government based on the election of *matai* representatives by *matai,* and the appointment as head of state of the holders of two nationally significant titles.

These wishes, along with the desire for a national court, the Lands and Titles Court, charged with resolving customary land and titles disputes according to Samoan custom and tradition, were embodied in the constitution (USP 1988:502–503). Some have argued that the embodiment of these principles in the constitution enshrined the importance of kinship and ensured the smooth transition and relative political stability that has followed independence.[19] They do not suggest that changes in the significance and organization of kinship had not occurred, but rather that these were relatively minor compared with those that would follow independence.

What followed independence was a consequence of both internal and external forces all of which, one might argue, necessarily followed a new relationship with the world-system. Four factors—a new electoral system, the growth of a wage economy in Samoa, changes in land tenure, and labor migration—have produced significant changes in the nature of both relationships between branches within *aiga* and between individuals and their *aiga* in the period since independence. The following sections deal with each of these factors and the changes that each has caused.

The Electoral System and Kinship

Samoa's full incorporation into the modern world-system required the formal adoption of the political symbols and practices of a "modern state" as

defined by the United Nations. It also required the modification of the Samoan form and style of governance, which, in the opinion of those charged with overseeing the transition to independence, lacked certain types of institutions and was insufficiently democratic. A transformation of the chieftaincy and, by extension, the basis of power and authority within families followed independence in 1962.

This change was an unanticipated consequence of the electoral provisions of the constitution. The charter provided for *matai* suffrage to elect forty-five *matai* members of parliament.[20] It quickly became apparent that members of parliament, and more especially cabinet ministers, were able to assist their supporters in various ways (Meleisea and Schoeffel 1983). Competition developed within electorates between aspiring candidates and *matai* who supported them and stood to benefit from their election.

One means of ensuring that candidates won power was to create more *matai* to increase their electoral power base. This end was achieved in some cases by creating new and spurious titles, *matai palota*,[21] and in others by creating multiple titleholders where before there had been one. As rival groups in many electorates became involved in these practices, the number of *matai* increased rapidly.

In an attempt to limit the dilution of the status of *matai* titles, parliament banned the creation of new titles and annulled those that had not existed on the eve of independence. To ensure that titles registered were legitimate, parliament further required claimants to demonstrate that defined procedures, which ensured that titles were bestowed by those entitled to bestow them on those whom they had chosen, had been followed before titles were registered in the Lands and Titles Court and their holders were entitled to vote.[22]

This ban did not, however, prevent the "splitting" of titles by families or rival factions within families,which has generated another set of problems that have generated tension within kin groups. As Meleisea and Schoeffel have noted, while "this solution [splitting] may be successful in the short term, in the long term the proliferation of title splitting may generate widespread dissension within families, regarding authority over family lands and subsequent issues over succession" (1983:105). This has proved to be the case, with an increasing number of apparently intractable cases being passed up to the Lands and Titles Court for settlement. Such settlements, in turn, may generate still further problems, because they are imposed by the court, albeit at the request of claimant groups. In the past such disputes were resolved within the *aiga*, and, as a consequence, the solutions were "owned" by its members.

Another factor in the transformation of chieftaincy has been the difficulty in agreeing on a single candidate to succeed to a title. In the past the suc-

cessor was chosen by incumbents on the basis of descent, service to the *matai,* and demonstrated competence in skills that could be placed at the disposal of the *aiga.* With an increasing number of family members involved in the nomination process and a growing number demonstrating service and an extended range of valued skills, it has become increasingly difficult for *aiga* to agree on a single candidate. This predicament has placed more pressure on families to split *matai* titles among rival claimants to obtain immediate solutions—solutions that may create greater difficulties and tensions within *aiga* in the longer term.

   In an attempt to resolve a steadily worsening problem, the government amended the Electoral Act to permit universal adult suffrage in 1990. This move effectively transferred power that had formerly resided with *matai* to untitled adult members of the *aiga.* Furthermore, the amendment meant that aspiring politicians were forced to distribute preelection "gifts" and postelection favors more widely (So‘o 1996). The net effect of these changes was to reduce *matai* influence and to increase that of untitled members of the *aiga.*

Wage and Salaried Labor and Kinship

A second factor that has opened the way for the transformation of kinship has been the emergence of a wage economy alongside the subsistence and cash-cropping economy. Although there has been waged labor in Samoa since the establishment of plantations in the middle of the nineteenth century, the proportion of the Samoan population involved in the sector has increased rapidly since independence as a consequence of the withdrawal of expatriate labor, increased government activity, and the growth of the manufacturing and service sectors.

   The waged workforce is made up of a public sector, which as of 1991 employed some 4,339 persons, or approximately 5 percent of the adult population (AIDAB 1994:76), and a private sector, which employed approximately 13,500 persons, or 17 percent of the adult population (ibid.:9).[23] A significant part of the workforce is employed in the capital, Apia, and resides in or near the urban area. While salaries and wages are not high,[24] the availability of wage labor means that a significant group of people are no longer solely dependent on kinship ties for access to a livelihood.

   Wage earners no longer need either house sites or agricultural land, which they would normally obtain from their *aiga* in return for service to it. This fact has the potential to transform the relationship between individuals and their *aiga* and *matai.* There is evidence that some wage earners who are free to do so are choosing to limit their ties and commitments to their *matai* and

their extended family. Where they choose to maintain their contributions to the family, these contributions are frequently qualitatively different. Many opt to substitute cash contributions for labor. Over time, Samoans argue, this practice leads to a loss of contact and the attenuation of bonds that were formerly based on cooperation. That many wage earners choose to place their income at the disposal of their *aiga* and *matai* and regard this contribution as another form of service, or *tautua,* to their family is an indication of the power of kinship ideology. It cannot, however, disguise the fact that these acts are now matters of choice for kin whose relationship with the *aiga* has been transformed by the changing social relations of production.

Wage or salaried labor has another consequence for kinship. It divides individuals' loyalties between two competing sources of authority, the first derived from kin relations and the second from employment relations. While the first form of authority recognized by employed individuals derives from complex historical and social sequences, the second derives from a simple exchange of wages for service. Faced with competing claims for one's time, energy, and support, a person must decide between competing authorities. In times past the kin authority would have had prior claim over an individual's time and energy. With the increasing monetization of Samoan society and the increased demand for cash, however, the authority of the manager, which would seem far less socially compelling, assumes increasing importance and does so at the expense of the authority of the chief.

Indeed, this change derives support from the highest levels of Samoan government. In 1997 the prime minister and the minister of labor drew attention to the high absenteeism rates at the Japanese-owned Yazaki assembly plant near Apia and urged Samoans to realize that these plants could leave Samoa and would do so if Samoan employees continued to take time off to attend to family business whenever they chose. They urged parents of employees to send their children to work and to encourage them to adopt better work practices.

Land Tenure and Kinship

A third factor that has opened the way for changes in kinship has been the creation of new forms of land tenure. There has, since European settlement, been a small freehold land market, and this market has provided opportunities for people to live away from family land and beyond the effective control of *matai* and *aiga* (O'Meara 1987, 1995). In the recent past the government has subdivided and sold freehold lots and increased the amount of freehold land available for settlement by people who wish to live in new forms of kinship units and more individualistic lifestyles. The growth of suburban

settlements around the capital Apia, in which smaller families live privatized lives based on incomes from wage earning, is a relatively new phenomenon in Samoa.[25] Rapidly rising demand and increasing prices for this land suggest a growing demand for this type of lifestyle. Perhaps the exact number of people living in this way is less important than the existence of a readily observable alternative family lifestyle.

This phenomenon is not, however, confined to the urban and peri-urban areas. Since the 1950s development economists and advisors have argued that customary land tenure has limited agricultural production (Stace 1956, 1963; Lauterbach 1963; AIDAB 1994:3, 4, 28–29). These advisors asserted that insecurity of tenure, the requirement that a certain proportion of production be assigned to the *matai* as a form of rent,[26] and the difficulties of obtaining credit for developments on customary land constituted disincentives to potentially productive farmers and discouraged more effective forms of land use. External and internal pressure to increase production, specifically export production, led the government to create the Samoa Land Corporation as part of its recent organizational restructuring program to oversee the subdivision and leasing of significant areas of Crown land to individual farmers for longer terms.[27]

This policy, shaped by advisors from international agencies concerned with strengthening the national economy, has created another group of people who are no longer dependent on their *aiga* and their *matai* for access to resources and are free to limit their commitment to and connections with family. It also provides experience in farming under more easily managed conditions. Unlike customary land, which may be subject to periodic challenges to tenure and variations in rents, leasehold tenure is effectively guaranteed for the life of the lease, and annual rents are fixed. Ironically, some of those who hold these leases say that they are more kindly disposed to their kin group now, as they no longer feel that kin are constantly frustrating their activities. The existence of this type of alternative arrangement offers an example of a greater degree of personal freedom and places pressure for change on traditional forms of land tenure and kin relations. This development is, however, limited by the amount of government land available for settlement and farming (Pitt 1970:94).

Changing land tenure and, by implication, kinship relations are not confined to freehold and leasehold land. Preliminary work by O'Meara (1987) revealed a move to a system of de facto freehold land tenure on customary land. Customary land, while nominally under the control of *matai* and *aiga,* in fact passed from parent to child at death. More recent work by the same author showed that this form of tenure is becoming more widespread (O'Meara 1995). Land rights no longer lapse at death but are in practice, if not in law, controlled and transmitted by individuals to their chosen heirs.

With this shift in tenure comes a change in the pattern of family relations that arises from a greater degree of independence from *matai* control and greater economic freedom. O'Meara (1987) has noted an increasing tendency to regard customary agricultural land as individual property and to resist the notion that a *matai* may demand, on behalf of the family, all or any part of the production from that land. It may be that, like the leaseholders, those who experience greater security of tenure and greater control over the distribution of the profits from their activities will feel more committed to their *aiga* than they did with less security and freedom. This possibility should not obscure the fact that those who continue to support their kin group do so voluntarily and that the fundamental basis of their connection with their kin group has changed.

Migration, Remittances, and Kinship

The final and most significant shifts in the organization of Samoan kinship are a consequence of emigration from Western Samoa since the 1950s. Uneven development in the Pacific generated a demand for labor in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States. An extended period of emigration from Western Samoa led to the formation of significant migrant enclaves in New Zealand (Pitt and Macpherson 1974; Krishnan et al. 1994; Statistics New Zealand 1995), Australia (Vaʻa 1995), and the United States (Franco 1987, 1990; Rolff 1978; Kotchek 1975). By 1989 some 76,200 Western Samoans were estimated to be living overseas (Ahlburg 1991:16).[28] The existence of these migrant populations has had a huge impact on the organization of kinship in Western Samoa in two areas: redistribution of resources and the demonstration of alternative forms of kinship organization.

Migrants have remitted significant amounts of both cash and goods to Samoa. Western Samoans were remitting WST$86.6 million annually. This sum is almost three times the value of Western Samoan exports (Ahlburg 1991:18), and it is economically extremely significant (Ahlburg 1995; Connell and Brown 1995; Brown 1995; Foster 1995; Walker and Brown 1995). It has also had a marked impact on the organization of kinship. As early as 1976, Paul Shankman noted: "As a new form of income remittances are not subject to the same kinds of redistributive pressures within the *aiga* as other forms of income, for in remittance redistribution, the title-holder can be bypassed as the redistributive agent" (1976:66).

Unlike the revenues from the use of customary land, which were traditionally channeled through the *matai* and returned to the members of the *aiga* as the *matai* deemed appropriate, remittances from migrants are frequently sent to individual members of families. Thus, no longer do *matai* alone control resource flows within the family, and individual households

with generous remitters abroad enjoy greater degrees of economic and social independence than was once possible. Furthermore: "Both remitters and recipients tend to regard remittances as personal property rather than as *aiga* property and, despite sanctions for wider redistribution, the sharing of remittances has become more confined to the immediate family" (Shankman 1976:66). Where individuals are determined to resist the pressure to redistribute remittances that they receive, they may retain, accumulate, and convert funds for private use in such areas as small business. Such practice may result in untitled people who are significantly better off and control greater resources than their *matai* (Macpherson 1988). Wider access to alternative sources of income has political and economic consequences. As early as 1976 it was apparent, as Shankman noted, that remittances "have substantially weakened the economic and political solidarity of the *aiga*" (1976:66).

Migrants have sponsored relatives' formal education both within Samoa and overseas. Such remittances have produced a pool of people who have acquired valuable skills and who may aspire to *matai* titles and a more effective role in leadership within an *aiga.* Remittances have also meant that more people within an *aiga* have access to income and are in position to use it to advance and promote their own candidates for leadership roles in the family. This practice may in turn increase the competition within the *aiga* for titles and compound the attendant tensions.

Thus, a number of branches or sections, *itu aiga,* of an *aiga* may have both credible candidates and the resources necessary to promote these candidates for leadership. The competition between *itu aiga* may produce considerable tension within the *aiga* and thus reduce political solidarity. The popular, short-term solution in many cases, conferring the title on several contenders, may simply postpone tension between *itu aiga.* Internal division may prevent an *aiga* from mobilizing its resources as effectively as it might have earlier when such internal political division was less common.

Furthermore, remittances have meant that families no longer need to work together for extended periods of time to produce corporate resources that were formerly used on their behalf by their *matai.* With alternative sources of income available from migrants at relatively short notice, it is no longer as necessary for a family to work its land together under the direction of a *matai* and to engage in the sort of collective activity that formerly generated a sense of family unity and common purpose. I am not suggesting that families do not continue to cooperate in corporate activities in which their family's honor and prestige is at stake. They do. It is simply the character, frequency, and amount of this cooperation that has changed.

But the most significant changes may be yet to come. As migrants who

have lived and worked overseas have moved back to Samoa, some have begun to mount challenges to the authority of *matai* and *aiga*. There have been cases of individuals claiming that individual rights embodied in the Western Samoan constitution take precedence over rights conferred on *matai* by tradition and legislation. Thus, individuals have claimed, for instance, that the right to freedom of religion takes precedence over the traditional practice of a family worshiping where its *matai* choose. Such views allow individual members to worship where they choose and without concern for the appearance of their family's solidarity and respect for the authority of its *matai*. While this may seem relatively insignificant, each successful challenge erodes the unity of the group and the authority of traditional leadership.

There have been further challenges from returnees who have chosen to maintain distance from their families and to live relatively affluent, individualistic lifestyles, often in urban areas. While the numbers of such people are small, in a society in which the young are increasingly exposed to and aspire to more materially affluent lives, this group's actions may send signals that materially successful people live away from the family and limit their contact with kin.

Conclusion

Samoa has maintained both an ideology and a system of extended kinship despite 170 years of contact with the West. Today, 82 percent of Samoa's land remains in customary ownership, or *fanua tau Samoa;* some 80 percent of the population lives in villages; and approximately 90 percent of the Western Samoan population claims, in the census, to live under the authority of a *matai*. Villages are run by councils comprising the heads, *matai,* of village families, and *matai* continue to govern the country. On the surface at least, kinship remains a central feature of Samoan social organizations and, in popular discourse, the ideology that legitimates kinship seems as robust and as popular as it ever was for many Samoans. But there have been significant changes in the organization of kinship since independence.

The connections between kinship and land tenure that lie at the heart of the traditional political economy have, as O'Meara has shown, been transformed in fundamental ways as a consequence of the commodification of land as its production value is rethought in the light of changing economic realities. The status of the *matai* and the limits to their authority over their families and over landholdings are also changing. The numbers, status, and bases of appointment of the *matai* and the bases and extent of their authority have been similarly changed as a consequence of the electoral provisions of the constitution adopted at independence. Since the family has been defined

as "all who were connected with the land and the title," fundamental changes in the nature of landholding and the office of the *matai* signal fundamental changes in the organization of kinship.

It is likely that these changes and others that will occur in the near future will create further and even more significant shifts in the structure and organization of Samoan kinship. But as experience has shown, these real changes may not be reflected in the ideology of kinship, which, like bamboo in a hurricane, may continue to bend with the wind and withstand the stresses to which it is subject.

NOTES

1. The Samoas are an archipelago in the southwest Pacific Ocean that once comprised a single political economy. In 1900, after an agreement by colonial powers, the Samoas were partitioned. The eastern islands have been administered by the United States as an unincorporated territory since that time. The western islands were administered first by Germany, then by New Zealand under a League of Nations mandate and later United Nations trusteeship until 1962, when Western Samoa became an independent state. In 1997 its parliament changed its name to Samoa.

2. Among these is the classic 1902 work by the German physician-ethnographer Augustin Krämer (Krämer 1994), Felix Keesing's 1934 study, and studies by a Commission of Enquiry into Lands and Titles in the early 1950s. A concise sociohistorical overview of the changes can be found in Meleisea's 1992 work.

3. Bougainville was so impressed with the construction of Samoan canoes and the speed and ease with which Samoans moved around within the island group that, in 1768, he named the group the Archipelago of Navigators.

4. The archipelago lies between 171 and 176 degrees West longitude and 13 and 15 degrees South latitude, and consists of two groups of high volcanic islands: in the west Upolu (1,114 sq km), Savai'i (1,820 sq km), Apolima, Manono, Fanuatapu, Namua, Nu'utele, Nu'ulua, and Nu'usafe'e; and in the east Tutuila (137 sq km), Ta'u (45 sq km), Aunu'u (1.4 sq km), Olosega, Ofu, and the atolls Rose and Swains Islands.

5. Detailed accounts of the earlier period can be found in Gilson 1970 and Meleisea 1987, and of the later period, during which New Zealand assumed responsibility for the administration of Samoa, in Davidson 1967 and Boyd 1969.

6. There are two classes of *matai: ali'i,* or high chiefs, and *tulafale,* or talking chiefs. The latter usually served and acted for the former in a range of sociopolitical activity.

7. An extended discussion of kinship can be found in Gilson 1970:29–64.

8. A discussion of the bases of these rights is contained in Pitt 1970.

9. The term *faʿasavali le matai* meant, literally, "to cause the chief to walk" and was invoked where incompetence or conduct brought the group into danger.

10. The names and histories of these districts are outlined in Turner 1983:232–266.

11. Williams's 1830 and 1832 journals suggest that he met or was told about some ten people throughout the group (Moyle 1984).

12. A detailed commentary on missionary activity in the Pacific can be found in Gunson's *Messengers of Grace* (1978).

13. This process is thought to have occurred quickly because of the decision by a key chief, Malietoa Vaiʿinupo, to embrace the new religion and because of the approach of the missions (Gilson 1970:97). In 1839 twelve Samoans were chosen to accompany Williams as missionaries in Melanesia, and by 1846 Samoan graduates of the Malua Theological Seminary were serving as pastors both in Samoa and farther afield.

14. A series of "household gods" provided omens that were used by families to determine propitious times and courses of social and political action.

15. Williams was concerned about the level of intervillage warfare. On his second visit he promised further missionaries only if Malietoa would put an end to war and persuade his followers to invest their energy in religious activity (Moyle 1984:122–123).

16. These wars were probably prolonged by European-settler factions that backed various families in an attempt to advance their own interests.

17. The government-controlled newspaper *O le Savali* and the London Missionary Society's *O Le Sulu Samoa* were essentially conservative media that reflected the interests of the government and the church, respectively. The arrival of privately owned newspapers opened the possibility of independent news.

18. For some thirty years television broadcasts, complete with commercials, from KRON San Francisco were rebroadcast and received in both American and Western Samoa. In the 1990s Western Samoa established a television service that rebroadcast a mix of New Zealand and local programs.

19. It can also be argued that the stability was a product of the fact that those who were dissatisfied with the system were able to migrate and did so.

20. Out of a total of forty-seven. The remaining two were elected by individual voters.

21. Literally, "voting chiefs."

22. Thus, in the thirteen years after independence, the number of *matai* increased from some 4,500, or 4.1 percent of the population, to an estimated 11,000, or 7.3 percent of the population (Meleisea and Schoeffel 1983:98–105); by 1989 it had reached 20,000 (Browne 1989:181).

23. This figure is likely to have increased significantly since 1991 as a consequence of the formation of new businesses, including the Yazaki Company, which alone employs over 3,200 employees.

24. Average salaries in 1991 ranged from WST$16,271 in the attorney general's office to WST$6,885 in Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries; the public-sector average was WST$7,398 (AIDAB 1994:76). The minimum wage was WST$1.10 per hour, and the average wage rates for unskilled labor was WST$1.35 (ibid.:20).

25. These people are different from the members of families who have always lived in town but remained involved in the affairs of their *aiga* and served their family by providing a home in town for visiting kin.

26. The problem was not the rental per se but the fact that it varied and discouraged "rational" economic planning. Furthermore, it was argued that more successful producers were more heavily "taxed" by *matai* and would withdraw from production.

27. Sixteen percent of Samoan land is owned by the government. This land was confiscated from German residents in 1914, administered as the Reparation Estates and later as the Western Samoa Trust Estates Corporation (WSTEC) during the New Zealand administration, and transferred to the Western Samoan Crown at independence. As AIDAB notes, the release of these lands so far has been slow because of the absence of divestment policies and operational procedures.

28. If the children of migrants are added to this total, the number of persons of Western Samoan descent residing overseas is probably closer to 240,000 compared with the 170,000 presently in Samoa.

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