

## In search of Meaning, Nuance and Metaphor<sup>1</sup>

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### **Samoan Mau History**

History expresses meaning, nuance and metaphor. In August 1924, General George Richardson, Administrator in Western Samoa, wrote to J.D.Gray Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the Cook Islands. I quote:

The natives are children and should not be legislated for as if they are a modern people. They are still less than a hundred years from the Stone Age and yet Nelson talks about democracy and British justice which goes down well in New Zealand but such rhetoric is a menace to these people who are not able to understand the arguments arising out of party politics. [ Archives Reference: IT 1 79/78 Part 1]

In a recent paper on the Mau, I said, this is a defining comment and was asked why. It is defining because it defines not only an attitude but as well a reference point which purportedly justified a different standard or measure. "The Samoans are children who are only a hundred years away from the Stone Age" and therefore (which he says is his point of departure from Nelson) a different standard or measure applies.

Unfortunately, this different standard rationale was sanctioned by the New Zealand Courts on the grounds that Richardson was deemed not accountable to New Zealand law at the time but to the terms of the League of Nations mandate. I quote from the Court Decision in Re Tamasese [1929 NZLR 209]

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented as a keynote address at a conference held at the National University of Samoa, 9 September 2002. The themes of language, history and politics are inherent within the themes of bilingualism. Hence, the paper is also presented at this forum for the purposes of re-emphasising these themes for the participants of this conference.

...It is the Council of the League of Nations which is the judge as to whether the methods adopted for promoting the material and moral wellbeing and social progress of Samoa are wise or unwise...

The Samoans of the Mau, returned the compliment. They in turn thought Richardson was a child. Their view was celebrated by derisive chant. As I noted in a paper I gave to the Pasifika Medical Conference in May 2000 on "Faa-Samoa speaks to my mind and my soul":

When *Palauli* district traveled from Savaii to Upolu to make their *talomua* presentation during the *Mau* period, their fleet would dock at the tip of the Mulinuu peninsula. From there they organised their parade, known as *taalolo*, from *Mulinuu* to *Vaimoso*. The designated *taupou* (a ranking unmarried lady) and *manaia* (the chief or his son) dress in their finery i.e. *tuiga* (head dress) whale tooth necklace, fine mat *lava lava*, perfumed with scented coconut oil; the chiefs are garbed in fine mats and the orators in *tapa* cloth. The untitled wear skirts of *ti* leaves with flower lei's which are the emblem of the Laifoni guild. Small cannons, remnants of earlier wars precede the parade firing powder gun salutes. An awesome sight. The men and women in *tuiga* lead the procession, wielding *nifo oti* (ceremonial long knife with a hook in the end) sometimes menacingly, sometimes in an expressive elegant movement. The *matai*'s amble with a grace that Rupert Brook admired. The young men flaunt supple muscular physique accentuated by the design and motif of the Samoan *tattoo*. Movement is orchestrated by chant. A lead voice clear and sonorous begins the chant

*Le Laifoni e, sola i lalō!*

to which the rest of the party respond in chorus

*Ai si tefe le Mālō!*

Translation:

Laifoni ( the honorific reference to the aumaga of Palauli)

withdraw below!

Eat semen from circumcising the Malo!

This is Samoa theatre at its best. There is colour, panoply, pageant, drama. Innocent onlookers are charmed, unaware that it is theatre promoting a powerful cultural message. Richardson, as *Malo*, may posture and puff up himself in uniform and flaunt his power but by their measure, he is a mere nubile boy they would circumcise and whose semen they would eat.

In the circumcision of young boys, a piece of wood is inserted between the soft flesh and the hard flesh. There is masturbation in order to harden the penis, facilitating cutting with a bamboo knife. If in the process of masturbation, the penis spurts semen, the circumcisors eat the semen, because semen symbolises the essence and pinnacle of life.

Additionally, the theatrics is making a political statement about calibre. The Samoan leadership were used to parlaying with high-calibre palagi officials. The point is probably best illustrated by comparing the calibre of German and New Zealand administrators. Solf returned to Germany and became the Colonial Minister in the Imperial German government. On Richardson's return to New Zealand, after his time in New Zealand, Field (1984) finds that Richardson

“...faded steadily into obscurity. Living in Auckland, he attempted to run for Parliament but could not even win a nomination. He was forced to quit the Auckland Returned Servicemen Association Committee in a scandal over funds which saw the Secretary drown when his car drove into the sea. He was elected to the Auckland City Council for a time and kept in touch with a number of Faipule to whom he preached a doctrine of anti-Mau hatred.” (Michael Field 1984, page 123)

Also Dr Damon Salesa recently critiqued Colonel Stephen Allen's “Notes on Samoa” stating that although,

“This document was still circulating some 20 years later, and was still considered by some officials to be authoritative. ... the arrogance and racism it contained was startling. Compared to the writings of Te Rangihiroa, both personal and private, or the contemporary work of Keesing or Margaret Mead, even that of other administrators, there is

great contrast. Most people who would read it now would probably be appalled.” [Salesa: Paper on the Mau p.8. 26 July 2002]

Schultz’ works on Samoan customs, laws and proverbs on the other hand, are still text.

So how do we identify meaning, nuance and metaphor in this context? Samoan historical meaning is accessible only through the Samoan language. Semen is a metaphor for the essence of life.

In the Samoan measure of manhood, Richardson is a nubile boy. This has literal and figurative meaning. Figuratively, the point is nuanced in the sense that when made, it is understood that compared to his predecessors, Richardson is a nubile boy.

### **Lands and Titles Court**

The main challenge to the Samoan Lands & Titles Court is a continuous search for meaning which will enable the Court to find a balance between Samoan culture and history on one side and the Western concepts of rights and justice on the other.

I want to share with you a recent experience in the Lands & Titles Court. The case of *Re Taimalieutu of Lupese’ē* in Nofoalii. I do so because it provides a good example of background – a background rich in imagery, nuance and metaphor. I will begin in Samoan and translate into English.

Na mavaea’ia e Muagututi’a ia Tupua Fuiavailili e sui tulaga ae faasala’ese le finagalo o Sa Tuala, aemaise Sa Tuala i Savaii. Fai mai, ia ifo tonu le fuiniu i le lapalapa.

Ua atupopole le finagalo o Muagututi’a. Afai o le ā le lagi ia te ia ae tumau pea le finagalo faasala’ese o Sa Tuala, e au ina vāvāō ma vevesi le atunuu. O se tasi sa iloga lana faautaga lelei i lea vaitau, o le toaina o Utu mai Nofoalii. O ia lea sa faamoemoe Muagututi’a na te sufia le finagalo faasala’ese o Sa Tuala. Fai mai le tala, e ui lava ina ma’a’a le finagalo o Sa Tuala aemaise ia Tuala ma Salā, ae na i’u ina masuigamālie, ona o le galuega a Utu.

Ona fai lea o tofiga a Muagututi'a: "Ua se tai suamālie lau aga ma lau amio Utu. Ua e tuitāma'i i le to'atūgā o Sa Tuala. Ua utusami Sa Tuala i le tai suamālie, ua maua ai sami e māgalo ai 'ai a Muagututi'a.

Sau ina e alu ma lou tai suamālie Utu, e te nofo i Lupese'ē, e fai 'oe ma *Fofoga o Sa Tuala* aua upu o si o'u atalii o Tupua."

O le mafuaaga lea o le *Taimalieutu*, e nofo i *Lupese'ē*. O le mafuaaga lea o le igoa-ipu a Taimalieutu o *Tuitama'i*. O le mafuaaga lea o le igoa o le sāvali a Sa Tuala, o le *Utusami*.

**Translation:** Muagututi'a designated Tupua Fuiavailili to succeed. There was resistance from Sa Tuala, particularly the Savaii branches to which Fepulea'i the natural son, was connected by marriage.

Muagututi'a was anxious, because if resistance persevered beyond his death, it could lead to dissension and worse. Muagututi'a appointed an old man renowned for his wisdom and tact, Utu by name, from Nofoaalii, to parlay on his behalf with the family of Sa Tuala. It is reported that the parlay was long and difficult. Fortunately in the end, the parties negotiated a settlement. The settlement was recognised as high achievement by Utu.

In Muagututi'a's last testament, he said: "Your conduct Utu is like the gentle rising tide. You are a healer of a great rift. Sa Tuala have filled their containers with sea-water from the gentle rising tide, which have provided seawater seasoning for Muagututi'a's food.

By this testament, you will be known as Taisuamalieutu (Utu, the gentle rising tide). You will reside in Lupese'ē and henceforth you will be the initiator and coordinator of the Sa Tuala conference.

From this story originates the title, *Taimalieutu* (Utu, the gentle rising tide), the cup name *Tuitama'i*, (healer of the rift), and the official title of the Sa Tuala messenger, *Utusami* (fetching sea-water in containers) *Taisuamalie* i.e. the gentle rising tide, is the metaphor for an amiable, modest and humble pacifier. *Tuitama'i*, healer of a great rift or a grievous wound is the metaphor for achieving spiritual and emotional peace, on which a durable political and social harmony is founded. *Utusami*, fetching sea-water with containers, is the metaphor for solace in

old age. The imagery is of an anxious old man who does not eat or eats sparingly because his food is unseasoned. Seawater is an essential ingredient of *palusami*; seawater is an essential ingredient of *samilolo* (fermented coconut flesh and seawater) which before salt and pepper and other imported spices provided the main seasoning for Samoan food. The availability of seasoning i.e. seawater symbolises resolution of the problem and the residual solace it brings to the old man who is Muagututi'a.

In the Re Taimalieutu judgement, the Lands & Titles Court acknowledged that the version of history referred to above and the attached genealogy were merely guides to determining whether or not to approve the appointment of the three petitioned titleholders. Whereas the Court was prepared to acknowledge that this version of history and its attached genealogy could be a guide, the Court was not prepared to rule either way until the Court was specifically asked to give a judgement on *pule* i.e. the authority or power to appoint a titleholder.

Very often the Lands and Titles Court is privy to information that neither academia nor Archives has access to. It is interesting to note that neither imagery nor metaphor, however powerful, can sway the Lands & Titles Court, to commit themselves to an extent which may subsequently inhibit or preclude a full and comprehensive examination of *pule*. Clearly this is deference to modern judicial standards.

### Rituals

Rituals also express meaning, nuance and metaphor. Shortly I'll show excerpts on videotape demonstrating how rituals express meaning, nuance and metaphor. They are excerpts from Prime Minister Helen Clark's wreath presentation at Tamasese's grave 4 June this year.

At the wreath presentation, Lufilufi, Falefa and Salani could have chanted the funeral chants, the birth chants, the war chants, the victory chants. Yet they did not. Instead, they chanted the marriage chants. Why?

In his speech, Faamatuainu Tala Mailei said, "Today, Prime Minister Helen Clark, you hear Lufilufi, Falefa and Salani chanting the marriage chants. Why? Because we are not here to mourn, we are here to celebrate the marriage of true minds.

For many many years, Lufilufi waited for this gesture. The words are simple and yet full of meaning: I am sorry. ...When we respond in love and forgiveness, there is a marriage of true minds which places the message of Tamasese amongst the gods and the angels.”

Faamatuainu concluded by saying: “I present this fine mat to seal our marriage. The name of the fine mat is *Le ageagea o Tumua*. It was stored in *Mulinuu ma Sepolata'emo*, residence of the Tuiatua.” End of quote.

The ritual is rich in symbolism. An explanation of the origin of the name *Le ageagea o Tumua*, i.e.the substance of Tumua, will assist in explaining the richness I mean.

The Tuitoga had two sons. The elder named Tuitoga after his father, the younger, Lautivunia. Lautivunia had an affair with his older brother's wife. When the affair became known, the older brother was very angry. As is custom, the younger brother made a peace offering which was cooked food, wrapped in *tolo* and *fiso* leaves. *Tolo* is sugar cane, *fiso* is the wild sugar cane. The leaves of the *tolo* and the *fiso* underline the message which is, Please forgive me for we are brothers. The older brother was not placated and Lautivunia made another peace offering which included the meat of bananas and the meat of the *lei* banana. The two varieties of bananas underline the message: We are flesh and blood, surely you can find it in your heart to forgive me. The older brother was still not placated. Lautivunia decided that if his older brother did not accept the food offering, then he will offer his life. He dug a hole where his catamaran was housed, placed spears at the bottom of the hole face upwards and committed suicide by throwing himself on the spears. The force of this motion pushed the surrounding earth and sand to cover him.

When Lautivunia's disappearance was noticed, the father and the brother sent search parties to look for him. A search party reached Tuiatua Leutele in Samoa. Tuiatua Leutele said: You need not have come so far. Lautivunia is in Tonga under his catamaran. The search party returned to Tonga and located the body of Lautivunia. The Tuitonga felt obligated and instructed the search party to return to Samoa with the finest of his fine mats, which he named *Le ageagea o Tumua* (the substance of Tumua) to reciprocate Tuiatua Leutele for the favour he had done him. As well, he recognised Tuiatua Leutele's prophetic powers by naming him Leutele Leiite i.e. Leutele with the prophetic powers.

What is the relevance of this ritual and the name of the fine mat to Prime Minister Helen Clark's presentation of a wreath at Tamasese's grave? The story and the act was about kinship. It was about love, it was about death, it was about remorse and it was about forgiveness. We are poorer spiritually and intellectually if we are unaware of the meaning, nuance and metaphor in this ritual.

## DEMONSTRATE ON VIDEOTAPE

### Songs and Chants

Songs and chants express meaning, nuance and metaphor. Samoans have a culture of death and a culture of dying. In our funeral rites, we celebrate life and spurn mourning. We celebrate our past victories against the celestials and flaunt in chant and ritual our power to reproduce as a gesture of dismissing death because we have the power to make a new person. The principal objective of our funeral rites is to lift us into an emotional high in which life is equated with death and life and death become one and equal.

God is the progenitor not the Creator. He is not awesome and distant. He is family and father figure. Heaven is only an extension of the extended family. Probably for this reason the funeral regimen is a tease and defiantly disrespectful.

Dying is the ultimate test of manhood. When a chief senses that the end is near, he has two principal duties to perform. Firstly he has to make his official farewell to the village. Secondly, he retires to a residence which is declared taboo where he teaches his carefully selected retainers how to die. If he fails, his mana and mystique is protected by *tapu*.

At the end of this part of my paper, I will play a song on CD which celebrates our culture of dying and our culture of death.

The song is about the dying and death of Tamasese, a Mau leader. As background, recently in a discussion I had with Michael Field about the shooting of Tamasese, I asked him about the dum-dum bullet that was used to shoot Tamasese. He said that,

“in the absence of a proper Coroner's Report, the evidence suggests that 303 bullets are known to make big gaping holes and dum-dum bullets are not accurate.” We agreed that considering the distance



from the Police Station where the gunman was stationed and the three-way intersection where Tamasese was , and considering the melee, the gunman would have had to be a sharpshooter to hit the target which was the hip. We also agreed that a wound in the hip ensured a long and painful death. From the time Tamasese was shot until he died twenty-four hours later, we also agreed that the cause of death had to be because of loss of blood. Thus, we both agreed that such evidence pointed conclusively to premeditation.

So from the time Tamasese was shot until he died twenty-four hours later, his dying was a public spectacle minutely scrutinised by the Samoans. It is his behaviour during the twenty four hour period that is pertinent here. His behaviour in the critical twenty-four hours met the highest standards of our culture of dying. The song makes the point that his dying and death was a symbol of a culture as much as it was a symbol of a cause.

In the beginning of the song, the intonation is wailing and the pace is slow portraying dying and death-sad.

Later, the song addresses the same theme of dying and death but there is a different intonation. There is a buoyancy and a quickening of pace portraying dying and death-triumphant. The song becomes as we say in Samoan *tausiva*. It is the high point in our culture of singing where lyrics and intonation underline equation. Life is equated with death; culture is equated with cause, and dying and death-sad is equated with dying and death-triumphant.

NOW, WE'LL TURN ON THE SONG

### Glossary

Words give/communicate/create meaning, nuance and metaphor. The current controversy about Ulrike's dictionary is tragic and painful. Especially painful to people like me who write in Samoan and very especially painful to people like me who write in Samoan and is invited as resident scholar to a university campus where I become aware of the great strides other Polynesian languages are making in etymology, linguistics and gain words.

I deliberately choose not to be involved in the controversy. Instead I prefer to submit what I believe is a constructive contribution. It is a glossary on the two books I've written in Samoan. In doing so, I ask all those who share my pain over the controversy to do two things:

1. Write a book or books in Samoan to contribute to the development of our language and culture;
2. Write a glossary explaining your use of terms

I hope that when you do, it will give you perspective.

When you do, I'd love to talk to you about Samoan etymology, Samoan linguistics and Samoan gain words. Why? Because I'd love to join you in the continuous search for meaning, nuance and metaphor.

I've asked the organisers of this conference to distribute amongst the conference participants who are interested, my Samoan glossary of 1213 words. My devoted editor *Sooletaua Fau'olo*, tells me that many if not most of the words, are not found in Pratt's Dictionary - and even where they're found, the words have a different meaning. But imagine if ten people each write a book and a glossary of a thousand words, we'd have the source material for a new Samoan dictionary.

### Conclusion

This paper is a search. It does not pretend to be anything more than a search.

I spoke at the funeral of one of my favourite teachers Brother Casimir and quoted my favourite saint St Augustine:

The truth is neither mine, nor his, nor another's, but belongs to us all  
whom Thou callest to partake of it, warning us terribly not to account  
it private to ourselves lest we be deprived of it.

Once we claim exclusive possession, we lose substance and direction. For Man is always in search and God is the sole custodian of the absolute.

Probably one of the reasons I am drawn to St Augustine is that he was a great sinner before he became a great saint. He was a libertine who used

to pray: "Dear Lord, make me chaste but not yet!" before he became the celebrated Bishop of Hippo.

The former Australian Chief Justice Brennan, who incidentally writes like an angel, concluded his paper titled Australian Values with a quote from St Augustine.

I want to do the same. Not because I presume to compare my work with the work of the great Augustine or Chief Justice Brennan but because I feel I'm treading familiar ground; where a man who takes up his calling late in life, says:

Too late I came to love thee

O thou beauty both so ancient and so fresh

Yea, too late came I to love thee

And behold, thou wert within me

And I out of myself where I made search for thee.

Soifua.