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Nationalism in Microstates: Realpolitik in the Two Samoas

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine one of the divided nations, the Samoas in the Pacific. The Samoan Archipelago is divided into two microstates: Western Samoa, an independent country; and American Samoa, a US territory. Although they recognize themselves as a nation, they are not interested in unification at all. Although the separation has created differences in their modern administrative organizations, their educational systems, and their degrees of modernization, the main reason for their different attitudes toward unification lies in the realist-politics (Realpolitik) of the microstates. In the case of the Samoas nationalism does not provide the power to recover the original united nation.

In 1899, the Samoan Archipelago was divided by the metropolitan powers into two territories: American Samoa, a territory of the United States; and German Samoa, which was called Western Samoa after New Zealand took it over from Germany in 1914 and kept that name after independence in 1962, until 1997, when it officially changed

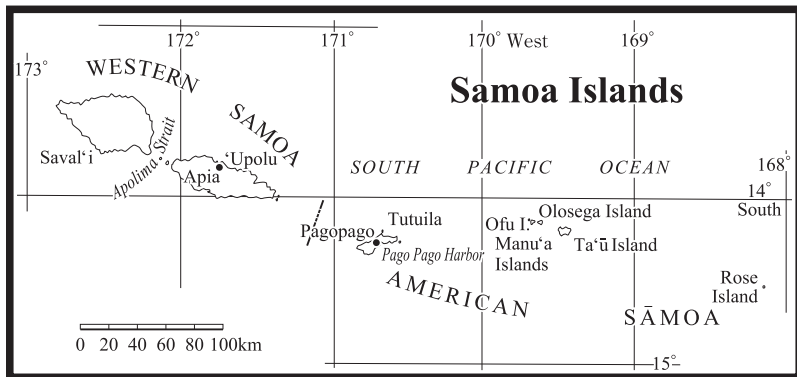


Chart 1 the Samoa Islands (Adapted from Bier 1990)

its name to the Independent State of Samoa. Here I call it Western Samoa despite its new name, to avoid any confusion. American Samoa is still a US overseas unincorporated territory, although it has become autonomous, the Governor being elected by the inhabitants and the territory sending one non-voting representative to the US Congress in Washington DC. Western Samoa was mandated to New Zealand by the League of Nations after World War I, then trusted again to New Zealand by the United Nations after World War II, and finally became independent in 1962.

The Samoan Archipelago shared the same homogeneous language, culture, and social structure before colonization. It is one nation divided into two political entities. It is because of the colonial powers and postcolonial regimes that the two Samoas began to have differences in administrative systems, modern politics, school systems, popular culture, etc.; these differences can be described in general as a British system vs. an American system.

Both Samoas had resistance movements, called Mau, against

their respective colonial governments through the 1920s and 1930s, and they have maintained a strong identification with the traditional chiefly system and their own way of managing their society. They call the system *fa'aSamoa*¹ or *fa'amatai*,² and it has been incorporated into both electoral systems today. In Western Samoa, only those who hold the chiefly title can be candidates for election to seats in the single-house parliament. In American Samoa, only chiefly title holders can run for election to senate seats, while anyone can run for seats in the house of representatives. We can say that Samoans of both sides have kept their strong nationalistic character and ideas.

Although they share a homogeneous social system and culture, so that we can say they are a single nation, the unification of the two Samoas has not been realized at all, and there is no prospect of working toward it. Occasionally the political leaders of Western Samoa refer to unification in their speeches, but it has never been taken seriously by the two governments. At the end of the 1970s, the then Prime Minister of Western Samoa Tupuola Efi (the present Head of State Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese) suggested the unification of Eastern and Western Samoas, but American Samoans ridiculed the idea.

The focus of this paper is to discuss the reason why unification is not sought despite of the nationalistic character of the Samoans. After an examination of the various socio-cultural differences and disparities that arose after colonization, I would argue that it is the choice of the Samoans, since they are able to take advantage of being

¹ *Fa'a* means 'in the way of' and *Fa'asamoa* means Samoan Way.

² *Matai* is a chiefly title holder who heads and leads an extended family. But some people claim that the mataiship is a modern constructed idea. *Fa'amatai* means *matai*'s leadership.

divided between different global systems. It is the Realpolitik choice of the microstates to keep their transnational way of living and, thus, to remain proud Samoans.

History of Separation

The Samoa Islands include 3,100 square kilometers of land area and are located between the Hawaiian Islands and Aotearoa/New Zealand, nearer to the latter. American Samoa's land area is only 199 square kilometers, while Western Samoa occupies two relatively large islands. The encounter with the West began in 1830 when the Evangelical mission of the London Missionary Society from Tahiti led by Rev. John Williams visited. McArthur estimates that the population of the whole island group was between 30,000 and 40,000 throughout the 19th century (McArthur 1967: 101). At the moment, it is about 240,000 (57,000 in American Samoa according to the 2000 census; 181,000 in Western Samoa according to the 2006 census) (SPC, Statistics and Demography 2010). The population formerly depended for subsistence on tuber crop production and slash-and-burn agriculture, which were supplemented by fishing. Nowadays, the cash economy is more important. In Western Samoa, manufacturing and tourism are becoming more important than production of cash crops such as taro, copra, and cacao. In American Samoa, fishing and canned food production accounts for almost all industry. Both countries are heavily dependent on remittances from overseas emigrants.

The islands were separated in the process of the colonial struggle among the metropolitan powers in the 19th century. The great powers involved were the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United States. The British took the Kingdom of Tonga, which is located to the

south of the Samoa Islands, and other places in the Pacific and Africa as its protectorates, declining to compete for the Samoa Islands. Germany and the United States differed in their aspirations for the colonization of Samoa: Germany was interested in economic development, while the United States wanted a naval base in the Southern Hemisphere. Accordingly, the Samoa Islands were divided between the Western part, with the two big islands of Upolu and Savaii, which Germany colonized for economic development; and the Eastern part, including the excellent port of Pago Pago, where the United States constructed a naval base. Thus, the three powers reached an agreement to throw away the Final Act, which had been agreed to in Berlin in 1889 to respect the Samoans' will and their sovereignty. The separation was finalized in 1899 (Kennedy 1974: 189-239).

However, German colonization and development in Western Samoa was soon disrupted by World War I. Immediately after the War broke out in 1914, New Zealand took over German Samoa without any violent confrontation. German colonies in the Pacific were easily taken over by the Allied forces, Micronesia being occupied by the Japanese and German New Guinea and the Bismarck Islands being occupied by the Australians without any difficulty.

After the Versailles Treaty, New Zealand set up its Administration in Western Samoa. New Zealand itself was a self-governing body under British dominion, and its inexperience as a colonial power brought some confusion to Western Samoa in the beginning. In 1926, a group of Samoans led by traditional leaders and part-European businessmen demanded that the government accept more Samoan leadership and autonomy. They were called the Mau, which means "voice" or "opinion" in Samoan. The Mau movement was suppressed,

and a bloody confrontation took place in 1929 in an incident referred to as Black Saturday. The Mau became a resistance movement which lasted until 1935, when the Labour Party in New Zealand took over the government and adopted the policy of allowing Samoans more autonomy and working toward its possible independence in the future.

On the other hand, Eastern Samoa, or American Samoa, became a US Navy base and was put under US military administration. There was also a Mau movement in American Samoa, inspired by the movement in Western Samoa, although it was rather different. In 1951, the US government decided to close the base and put American Samoa under the direct administration of the Department of the Interior. Around 1960, a development program was brought into the territory and the fish canning industry was introduced. Since that time American Samoa has been an unincorporated unorganized US territory with a self-governing system under a constitution. The governor of American Samoa has been chosen by election since 1977. American Samoa has a bicameral parliament with a senate and a house of representatives. American Samoans are provided American passports and are free to go to and travel around the US proper. Nevertheless, they do not have the right to vote in presidential and other national elections. They are not American citizens but American nationals.

Cultural Study of Separation

Samoans are Polynesians whose cultural homogeneity is extreme. Although Polynesia covers a large area in the Pacific region, similarity among the Polynesian cultures is conspicuous. Archaeological data show that the Samoan migration to the Pacific goes back to 3,000 years ago, and they were the first inhabitants in the

area. Within the Samoan Culture Area, local differences are minimal, and the language lacks dialects. There have been intermarriages between the West and the East, and the kinship networks cover the whole Island group. Customs and social systems have been shared by the two areas. The cultural border that separates the Samoas from other Polynesian cultures such as neighboring Tokelau, Tonga, and the Cook Islands is obvious, with the water that surrounds the islands. It is clear that Samoa is a single cultural and linguistic unit. In the cases of East and West Germany, North and South Korea, and the East and West parts of New Guinea Island, socio-cultural differences have been observed as one of the reasons for separation. But the Samoan case is different: their homogeneity is extreme. So what has been the reason for the continuing separation even after Western Samoa achieved independence and American Samoa became self-governing?

At least from the socio-cultural standpoint, there has been political hostility between the two Samoas. Both Samoas shared the traditional chiefly system, and the chiefs of Tutuila Island were willing to sign their names to the cession document in 1900 which made it possible for the US government to build the naval base in Tutuila. It is said that their willingness derived from the fact that the chiefs in Tutuila Island had been forced to accept lower statuses under the domination of the chiefs of Atua, the Eastern polity of Upolu Island, in the Samoan chiefly system hierarchy.

Tui Manu'a - literally Lord Manu'a, historically the most important title in the whole framework of Samoan chiefly hierarchy - is located in the Manu'a Islands on the Eastern tip of American Samoa; the holder of this title had been respected by all of Samoa, and even by Western Samoan chiefs. Nevertheless, he was not recognized to have

power over all of Samoa. Although Western Samoans paid respect to Tui Manu'a, they were not ruled by Tui Manu'a, nor were they under the administration of Manu'a. In Western Samoa, the most populated Upolu Island is also the most intensive area of political rivalry. Upolu is divided into three polities: the western, the central, and the eastern. Savaii Island is also divided into six districts, and some high titles there were recognized all over Samoa. Tutuila Island was traditionally less important and was subjugated to Atua, the eastern polity of Upolu Island. Compared with Savaii Island, where the high chiefs retained politico-religious authority even when they had no actual political power, the chiefs of Tutuila Island were looked down upon, because Tutuila provided asylum for refugees from Upolu, and it was the place to which defeated high chiefs were sometimes banished. A Western Samoan explained to me the contempt toward Tutuila by saying, "That place was a penal colony before."

On the other hand, it took some time before Tui Manu'a of the Manu'a Islands, who claimed the power over the whole of the Samoa Islands, signed his name to the deeds of cession in 1904, later than those in Tutuila in 1900. From the perspective of Western Samoa, the Manu'a Islands were not at all a place to be looked down upon, because many legends related that the authority of quite a few high chiefs of Western Samoa originated from the involvement of Tui Manu'a in the origins of their title names; but there was no point in admitting Tui Manu'a's power over the whole of Samoa. Thus the claim from Tui Manu'a was not at all practical, and Tui Manu'a finally gave in to the partition in 1904 (Gray 1980). The separation of the Samoa Islands by the great powers was accomplished locally in the end.

Thus, in spite of the homogeneity of their original culture

and language, there are two kinds of Samoans: those who look up to London (through New Zealand) as the Center of the World; and those who look up to Washington, DC, or New York as the Center of the World. They are not only concerned with their former or present metropolitan powers: their respective cultural and psychological ties are different. They are loyal to either Britain or America.

First of all, their English is different. In Western Samoa, government officials speak with British, especially New Zealand, accents. Most of them wear the Samoan formal attire of *'ie faitaga*³ and talk politely but in a rather detached and authoritative way. On the other hand, American Samoan officers are very kind and friendly. They often call you by your first name even when meeting you for the first time. Also different are electric current systems, video systems, and TV programs. You may watch CNN in American Samoa, while TV New Zealand News is broadcast in Western Samoa.

Education systems and cultures are also different. School-children in Western Samoan schools wear uniforms with white or pastel-colored shirts and *'ie faitaga* for boys and pleated skirts for girls. You can tell which school a student attends by his or her uniform. In American Samoa, public high school students walk around most of the time in T-shirt and jeans or miniskirts, although there are certain days when they must wear uniforms. Many of them walk while listening to iPods. You feel as if you are in the United States. Western Samoan youth play cricket, soccer, and rugby, while American Samoan youth like American football and basketball - although they also play cricket, which is adopted from Western Samoa.

³ Pocket lavalava. Male lavalava with pockets.

Nowadays, Western Samoa has its own university to educate its youth. But Western Samoa maintains scholarship schemes for excellent students. The best students go to New Zealand, Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and other British-influenced countries. A very few top students are selected to go to England, and their parents are really proud. There are some scholarships to go to the United States, but Western Samoans believe that universities in the United States are low-standard, and the best students do not want to go to the States. On the other hand, American Samoans go to American universities, with the help of government scholarships and their own funds, and many of them are helped by their relatives in the States, although some Pacific schools such as Fiji Medical School are also highly evaluated.

We may observe many more trivial differences. Nevertheless, in spite of the new gap created recently between them, the organizations of both Samoas make official visits to each other now and then, and there is a great deal of intermarriage since the traditional protocols are basically the same. Some church and teachers' organizations also still visit each other.

Political Economy of Separation

As described above, we are able to observe differences between the lifestyles of American and Western Samoans. More importantly, however, the politico-economic disparity between the two Samoas is crucial, and the socio-cultural differences are more deliberately emphasized because of the gap in the economic situations.

Western Samoa had primary industry even before World War II, while American Samoa, whose land area is only one-fifteenth the area of Western Samoa, had only a limited amount of flat land and had

a shortage of land even for its own subsistence. Many jobs had been created by the naval base before it was removed. American Samoa was at a loss when the base was closed in 1951, leaving the territory without any industry and with poor subsistence. In the same year, many Samoan soldiers and civilians who worked on the base were transferred to Pearl Harbor, and many of their relatives migrated to Hawaii and later to the mainland in the following years. The migration has continued until now, giving American Samoans, who are officially free to travel to and live on the US proper, the choice of whether to come back to Samoa or to stay on the mainland. They only need to pay the cost of travel and find places to stay, which are easily provided by relatives. Migration was the only solution for many of the people. Military recruiters came to Pagopago regularly to find new soldiers.

American Samoa was a “lost island” until around 1960, when President John F. Kennedy introduced a development scheme for Pacific dependencies and trust territories. A significant amount of money was provided for the development of the territory’s infrastructure. A hotel, an airport, a hospital, roads, school buildings, and a TV system were built. And the cannery business was introduced. Japanese fishermen first came to catch wahoo (a kind of mackerel); they were followed by Okinawans, then Taiwanese and Koreans. Samoans were not good at deep-sea fishing, so they worked in the canneries. American Samoa evolved from a subsistence economy to a cash economy.

Although the government is still the largest employer, the canning business is the major private-sector enterprise in American Samoa. It earns quite a large amount of money, if we compare it to the industries of the other countries in the region. Some scholars

warn about the vulnerability of the industry since production from the cannery accounts for more than 90% of total exports: its share of exports was 99% in 2008, 97% in 2007, and 98% in 2006 (American Samoa Government 2008). Nevertheless, American Samoa is quite a rich country compared to other small Pacific island countries. Because it is a territory of the United States, American Samoa's minimum wage is close to that of the States. On the other hand, the minimum wage in Western Samoa is much smaller: a day's pay is about equal to the American Samoan's earnings for an hour or two of work.

The wage in the canneries cannot attract the youth of American Samoa who wish to be successful in the United States proper. They have their own American Dream - enlisting in the military or migrating to Hawaii or the US mainland assisted by relatives who have already established themselves there. Depopulated American Samoa is not able to provide enough American Samoan workers for the canneries, and the labor shortage is compensated for by the population of surrounding countries, mainly Western Samoa and the Kingdom of Tonga. The population of American Samoa is about 57,300 (2000 census); of them, 17,700 were born in Western Samoa while most of the rest are American Samoa-born. 31,600 have mothers born in Western Samoa and 31,500 have fathers born in Western Samoa. For 31,200, neither parent was born in American Samoa; only 11,000 have two parents who were born in American Samoa. Children born to Western Samoan parents become American Samoans if they are born in American Samoa, and this is how American Samoa is populated these days.

Western Samoans and Tongans are eager to come to American Samoa to work. It is a neighboring island and has the same weather. As Pago Pago is a free port, they are able to obtain manufactured goods

like cars and audiovisual appliances; food products like frozen chicken are very cheap. Especially for Western Samoans, there is no language barrier, and they have relatives if they need help. They, of course, send remittances home.

It is vital to the labor migration system complex incorporating the United States proper, American Samoa, Western Samoa, and Tonga that American Samoa should remain an American territory. The complex would be terminated if American Samoa should become independent of the United States, or if the two Samoas should be united. Then it would become difficult for American Samoans to migrate to the United States proper and to maintain high salaries. And it also would not be good at all for the Western Samoans and Tongans.

In 1960, the United Nations issued the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (resolution 1514 (XV)), which also included trust and non-self-governing territories. Many countries became independent after the issuing of this Declaration. The General Assembly proclaimed 1990-2000 as the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and American Samoa was again found to be still on the list of the 16 territories yet to be decolonized. 2000-2010 was proclaimed the second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

American Samoan political leaders attending decolonization seminars have claimed that American Samoa became a territory by mutual agreement through a treaty of cession⁴ and not by any conquest or annexation, and that they have established a unique

⁴ American Samoan political leaders use “treaty” instead of “deed” (Faleomavaega 1995: 34)

political relationship with the United States (Pacific Islands Report 2001b, 2001c). Their position has remained the same since the 1990s: “During the 1993 and 1998 meetings of the Special Committee, Tauese reiterated that American Samoa is a U.S. territory, not a colony, and its people want the current political status to remain” (Pacific Islands Report 2001d). According to Samoa News, “Both Tauese (Governor) and Faleomavaega (Congressman) noted that a plebiscite held in the territory about 10 years ago indicated that the public prefers the status of U.S. territory” (Pacific Islands Report 2001d). The main stance of the people of American Samoa was repeated in “Statement by Governor Tauese P.F. Sunia on the Status and Wishes of the People of the United States Territory of American Samoa” (Tauese 2001), which was read at the 2001 Decolonization Seminar in Havana.

I assumed that this was the firm and final claim by American Samoa. However, there seems to be one step forward taken by the successive governor recently. According to Samoa News, Governor Togiola Tulafono said that he believes “the best political status for American Samoa is to have the same relationship with the United States as Palau does, which is free-association. Although it does not bring US citizenship automatically, Palauans are entitled to dual citizenship. In the free-association arrangement, it is possible to obtain ODA from a third country” (Pacific Islands Report 2010a). According to a news release from the American Samoa’s Governor Office, Governor Togiola Tulafono formally presented American Samoa’s stance on non-self-governing territories at the opening of the 2010 UN Special Committee on Decolonization’s Pacific Seminar in New Caledonia. The governor said he seeks greater self-determination, while he characterized the present status of American Samoa as that

of an unincorporated and unorganized US territory (Pacific Islands Report 2010b). American Samoa now seeks more autonomy within its special relationship scheme with the United States, but not complete independence. Unification is not at all being discussed here.

For Western Samoans, it is profitable to be side by side with their Americanized brothers. This attitude of Western Samoans is represented by a speech delivered by the present Prime Minister of Western Samoa, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, in Hawaii in January 2001, in which he said: “(W)hile the two Samoas have good relations and some in each country hope for unification some day, political and economic differences make that very unlikely ‘as yet’” (Pacific Islands Report 2001a). The Samoans are not necessarily seeking to be united as a nation or to build one united nation-state.

Concluding Remarks

Samoans are proud people. They have their own brand of nationalism and preserve their traditional way of running the government. This was most important at the time of the resistance or nationalist movement in 1926-35. But they also are quite practical. They are obliged to maintain the reputation of their own family. They need to support their family life and village life. Since this politico-economic structure is key to allowing the residents of the microstates, American and Western Samoa, to live and to earn money in the transnational migration network, they will remain as they are; they will neither insist on unification nor even mention it.

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