

# 18. More Than 20 Years of Political Stability in Samoa under the Human Rights Protection Party

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Except for a short time in 1982 and during the time of the Coalition Government in 1986–87, the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) has run Samoa since 1982. Among the attributes of HRPP rule in that time has been its ability to maintain political stability in the country. This chapter argues that a combination of factors contributed to political stability during the period of HRPP rule from 1982 to the present (2006) and that the HRPP has been successful in managing these factors to its political advantage. They include the distinct manner in which the country’s constitution has made possible a blending of indigenous and introduced democratic institutions and practices: HRPP leadership style, HRPP consolidation strategies, HRPP policies, the relatively small size of the national population, and the ability of the HRPP to bring the Public Service into its political orbit, among others.

## **The Constitution**

The Constitution of the independent state of Samoa blends selected elements of Samoa’s indigenous sociopolitical system with those of liberal democracy. The end result is a compromise of the two systems that so far has been satisfactory enough to prevent any drastic social and political upheavals in the country. For example, the inclusion of elements of Samoan custom and tradition in the Constitution has allowed the continuation of institutions and practices with which Samoans are comfortable as they form part of the Samoans’ world on a day-to-day basis. As long as Samoans feel that they are part of the system, they want to abide by it and uphold it. Moreover, the value system associated with custom and tradition has helped prevent situations of potential conflict from erupting. The inclusion of democratic institutions and practices in the constitution, on the other hand, has served two purposes. First, it provides the processes for the operation of democracy and, secondly, as long as those processes are adhered to, they become a mechanism for absorbing and diffusing potential conflict.

When the Constitution was drafted in 1960, a conscious decision was made to accommodate holders of the four highest-ranking *matai* (chiefly) titles, *tama-a-’äiga* (So’o 1996: 130). In that way the traditional respect for these titles was continued. Those four titles include Mälietoā, Tupua Tamasese, Matä’afa

and Tuimaleali'ifano. Holders of the Mälietoā and the Tupua Tamasese titles became Joint Head of State for life (Constitution Art. 17). Matā'afa Fiamē Faumuina Mulinu'ū II became the first Prime Minister of Samoa and Tuimaleali'ifano Suatipatipa was appointed the Council of Deputies, which effectively was Deputy Head of State.

There have been three situations during the HRPP rule that could have led to political instability. In each situation, however, a combination of democratic processes and the traditional respect for the Head of State, who also holds one of the four *tama-a-äiga* titles, prevented an eruption into open conflict. The first was in May 1982, when the HRPP lost the prime ministership and with it the government when its leader, Va'ai Kolone, lost his seat in an election petition. The loss of Kolone's seat brought to 23 each the number of seats held by the HRPP and the opposition parliamentary faction under Tupuola Efi. Instead of awaiting the result of the by-election to be held in late 1982, inviting the next in rank in the HRPP to take over from Kolone, or asking the HRPP to elect a replacement, the Head of State invited Efi to form a government. The result of the keenly awaited by-election gave the HRPP the one-seat majority it desperately needed to regain the government. By that time, the HRPP had elected Tofilau Eti Alesana to be its next leader (*Samoa Times* [ST], October 11, 1982). Instead of accepting Efi's offer of four ministerial posts in a coalition government under him as Prime Minister, the HRPP put pressure on the Head of State to convene the next session of Parliament in which Efi's budget was defeated (ST, December 10, 1982). The result was to bring the HRPP back to power with Alesana as Prime Minister.

The second situation came immediately after the 1985 general elections, when the HRPP had an outright majority, winning 32 of the 47 seats in Parliament. Before the 1985 general elections, the party had decided not to make a decision on its next leader until after the general elections. On February 26, 1985, the HRPP met to decide its next leader (*Pacific Islands Monthly* [PIM], April 1985: 7). Although four candidates were put forward, it came down to a choice between Alesana and Kolone. Although Alesana won, it was clear that Kolone had strong support in the parliamentary party. Fallout from the decision included three resignations immediately after the meeting. Le Tagaloa and his wife, 'Ai'ono Fanaafi, who had been elected to Parliament for the first time, announced they were leaving the party. According to Tagaloa, he was unhappy with the manner in which cabinet in the previous government treated caucus (ST, March 15, 1985). Tagaloa had been one of the candidates for the HRPP leadership. About the same time, Kolone also announced his resignation. He claimed that the HRPP had walked away from its founding principles and that he might never have another chance to be Prime Minister (ST, March 8, 1985).

Rumours abounded that the HRPP was breaking up and that Kolone's supporters would follow his example (*ST*, March 22, 1985). By the time of the ministerial elections, however, Alesana was elected unopposed after Kolone had turned down his nomination for the prime ministership by an MP of the Epi faction (*Western Samoa Hansard* 1985, Vol. I: 2–3). It was not until late 1985 that rumours of a defection from the HRPP became a reality. By the time of the last session of Parliament in that year, 11 HRPP MPs had defected to form a coalition government with Efi's 15 supporters. Alesana's budget for 1986 was defeated in parliament by the combined force of Kolone and Efi supporters and Kolone and Efi became Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, respectively.

The third situation arose in the 1990s during protest marches organised by the traditional representatives of *Tumua* and *Pule* and '*Āiga* (*TPA*) against the Government. *TPA* encapsulates the totality of indigenous sociopolitical structures and their associated practices and processes, and value system. The origin of these protests can be traced to the introduction of the 10 per cent Value Added Goods and Services Tax (VAGST) on January 1, 1994. A misunderstanding between the government and the Price Control Board resulted in the enforcement of the new price order on the day the VAGST became effective (*Observer*, March 1, 1994), resulting in a 40 per cent increase in the cost of living (*Observer*, February 11, 1994). Protest marches continued intermittently until mid-1995. The two objectives of the protest marches were the abolition of the VAGST and the changing of the Government (*Observer*, March 1, 1994). The high and end point of the protest marches was when a petition allegedly signed by 133,354 supporters was submitted to the Head of State. On receiving the petition, the Head of State told the delegation that the Executive Council would meet to discuss it (*Observer*, March 12, 1995). On March 11, a special 14-member committee was appointed by the Government, with terms of reference that included investigation of the validity of the signatures in the petition (*Observer*, May 12, June 6, 1995). Its report, presented to the Government in mid-August 1995, invalidated the *TPA* petition. The report claimed the petition was illegal because any petition was supposed to be presented to Parliament.

In what ways have the incorporation of custom, tradition and democracy into the country's constitution prevented these three situations from erupting into public disorder and lawlessness, and what role did the HRPP play in them? I will try to answer these questions with reference to the three situations described above. The fact that Samoa had three prime ministers in 1982 suggests instances of potential political instability given the difficulty to govern under those circumstances. For a prime minister to lose his seat in an election petition that simultaneously resulted in a change of government shocked the HRPP and the country. There were rumours that Alesana, who succeeded Kolone to the HRPP leadership and the prime ministership, had instigated the election petition that brought down his party leader (Ale 1990: 13). Some political observers reasoned

that such political engineering was necessary to provide an opening for Alesana to wrest the party leadership from Kolone. It was unfortunate, therefore, that Kolone became the pawn on Alesana's political chessboard, but such was the nature of politics. Thus there was potential instability in the HRPP organisation although this would surface only in the leadership meeting after the results of the next general elections were known.

The appointment by the Head of State of Efi to form a government immediately after Kolone had lost his seat and the prime ministership in 1982 received sharp public criticism. Some critics expressed their distaste for what the Head of State had done, suspecting that he, a *tama-a-'äiga*, had always preferred Efi as Prime Minister as he was the son of a former *tama-a-'äiga*. Why else would he appoint Efi to form a government when he did not have a mandate to govern the country? He had neither the support of the majority of Members of Parliament nor had he been elected by Parliament under the relevant constitutional provisions (ST, September 24, 1982). Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, no one was prepared to go further than publicising their views in the local newspapers or speaking their minds in Parliament. The choice of Efi to succeed Kolone was that of the Head of State, who was also a *tama-a-'äiga*. Traditional respect for the Head of State's ranking in the Samoan chiefly hierarchy and the accepted legitimacy of his position as Head of State, given the fact he was also a *tama-a-'äiga*, helped prevent any further protest beyond public criticism in the media.

In the two situations described above, there was always the opportunity for resort to democratic processes. Kolone lost and regained his parliamentary seat having followed the due processes of democracy and the law. It was an election petition that brought down Kolone and it was a by-election that brought him back to Parliament. Whether there was any truth in the rumours that Alesana had engineered Kolone's fall, the fact remains that Alesana was later elected by his peers to lead their political party. Alesana's later election to the Prime Ministership was done by Parliament after the defeat in Parliament of Efi's budget. Thus, although there was the potential for political instability in the early years of HRPP rule, respect for the Head of State, the legitimacy of his constitutional role and ranking in the chiefly system, and adherence to the due processes of law and democracy prevented serious political instability. As HRPP rule became more entrenched, it had to deal with a potential conflict situation of a different kind. This happened in 1985.

The results of the general elections on February 22, 1985, gave the HRPP 32 of the 47 seats in Parliament. It was a keenly contested election. For the first time since independence all the seats in Parliament were contested. The HRPP had decided before the general elections that it would wait until after the results were known before it chose its next leader. Although Kolone and the other leadership candidates and their respective supporters were disappointed, the

democratic principle of majority decision won out in the end. Alesana, who had the HRPP's majority vote, formed the government. However, when Kolone and his 11 supporters eventually left the HRPP to form a coalition government with Efi's supporters, despite Alesana's unwillingness to step down from the prime ministership, the democratic process of succession to the prime ministership as decided by Parliament again won out, thereby avoiding open conflict, which could have led to political instability.

The *TPA* protest marches of the 1990s were perhaps the most sensitive political situation in post-independence Samoa and could easily have led to political instability. Initiated by the *Tumua* political centres on Upolu Island, the organisers of the demonstration met with and obtained the support of the six *Pule* political centres on Savai'i Island as well as the traditional political district of Aiga-i-le-Tai. As one spokesman of the movement pointed out, the six *Pule* 'didn't have any sense of hesitation'; they had 'been waiting for *Tumua* to make the move' (*Observer*, February 11, 1994). In an article that explained the developments which led to the formation of the *Tumua* and *Pule* demonstration, the *Observer* referred to *Tumua* and *Pule* as the 'traditional arbitrators over national crises' (ibid.). Another article in the same edition called on *Tumua* and *Pule* to save the country from the current crisis. In a press release on February 24, 1994, the *TPA* stated that the two objectives of its planned demonstration were the abolition of the VAGST and the changing of the government (*Observer*, March 1, 1994). In a speech on national television on February 27, 1994, the prime minister responded to the second objective by stipulating the various constitutional ways in which a government could be changed.<sup>1</sup> He was driving home the point that by their planned protest march, *Tumua* and *Pule* could not force an immediate change of government (*Observer*, March 1, 1994). An editorial had alluded to the possibility that the Head of State would most likely

declare a state of emergency exists if the protest march against the high cost of living goes ahead on 2 March as planned. He is empowered under the Constitution to do this. But only if he is satisfied 'acting in his discretion after consultation with Cabinet' that the 'economic life of Western Samoa' is threatened by an 'internal disturbance'. (*Observer*, February 23, 1994)

The protest march went ahead as planned on March 2, 1994; close to 20,000 people participated. About half of them were *matai* (*Observer*, March 3, 1994). The demonstrators marched for about five miles from Vaimoso, a village on the western outskirts of the national capital Apia, towards the main government building in the centre of Apia to deliver their petition to the prime minister and his cabinet. *Tumua* and *Pule* designated the Leader of the Opposition, Tui Ātua Tupua Tamasese 'Efi, to be their spokesman and officially deliver their petition to the Government. Alesana responded that the Head of State had agreed to an

Executive Council meeting on March 4 in an effort to solve the matter. Furthermore, the government was planning a further reduction in prices of items on the Price Order (*Observer*, March 3, 1994). Insisting that the VAGST be abolished, *Tumua* and *Pule* refused to disband until that objective was realised, and began a two-week camp in front of the government building. Responding to the prime minister's reply to their petition, 'Efi said: 'If you cannot see what is happening, then you must be blind. And if you cannot hear the people's moaning, then you must be deaf' (ibid.).

In an announcement on national radio 2AP, the Prime Minister said that after a decision of the Executive Council on March 4, the VAGST would remain unchanged. Instead, duties on all basic commodities would be reduced. The details would be announced officially in Parliament when it met on March 15 (*Observer*, March 6, 1994). With the government prepared to compromise, a solution to the demonstrators' demands seemed imminent. The *TPA* leadership then sent a second delegation to the Head of State asking him to hold a referendum to ascertain the public's views on how the cost of living was affecting them (*Observer*, March 9, 1994). When Parliament convened on March 15, 1994, the Minister of Finance, in his 1993–94 budget, announced the 32 basic commodities on which tax would be reduced. The tax reduction ranged from total abolition to a 50 per cent reduction (*Observer*, March 16, 1994). On announcement of the tax reductions, the demonstrators, who had stayed on the government premises since March 2, decided to disband. However, the *TPA* leadership decided to keep up the pressure to have the VAGST abolished on all goods.

Another *TPA* delegation was sent to the Head of State in August 1994 asking him to abolish the VAGST and to acknowledge the Chief Auditor's report, in which, among other things, the Chief Auditor 'gave detailed instances of wide-scale corruption and implicated a number of ministers and government officials' (*Observer*, January 13, 1995).<sup>2</sup> The Head of State asked the delegation to give him a written petition and an indication of the number of people who supported it (*Observer*, September 13, 1994). A signed petition was presented on March 11, 1995, by a *TPA* delegation, immediately after another public march in which about 30,000 people participated. A total of 133,354 people were claimed to have signed the petition. Of these, 122,954 were Samoans residing in Western Samoa while the other 10,400 were Samoans residing in Wellington, New Zealand. People in the latter group 'were concerned that the remittances they were sending over for their families' upkeep here were being subject to the 10% tax when the funds had already been taxed in New Zealand' (*Observer*, March 10, 1995). On receiving the petition, the Head of State told the delegation that the Executive Council would meet to discuss it (*Observer*, March, 12, 1995). On March 11, a special 14-member committee was appointed by the government, with terms of reference that included investigation of the validity of the signatures in the

petition (*Observer*, May 12, June 6, 1995). Its report, presented to the Government in mid-August 1995, invalidated the *TPA* petition. The report claimed that the petition was illegal because any petition was supposed to be presented to Parliament. Of the 12 *matai* who signed the petition, one had not officially registered his title with the Land and Titles Court. Of the alleged signatures in the petition, 122,179 had not personally signed their names. The president of *TPA*, Fa'amatuäinu, 'said that even babies and children who cannot read or write were included in the petition as their parents can sign for them as they are the ones taking care of them and [feeding] them' (*Samoa Bulletin*, September 22, 1995). Furthermore, the issues of the VAGST and the Chief Auditor's report had all been debated and passed in Parliament (*Savali*, September 15, 1995; *Observer*, September 27, 1995).

In its June 24, 1994, edition, the *Observer* noted that the Police Department was probing whether there were seditious intentions behind the *TPA* national protest on March 2, 1994. The government pressed ahead with sedition charges against *TPA* President, Mailei, and one of its executive members, To'alepai Toesulusulu Si'ueva, despite persistent pressure from the local and international media and Amnesty International to have the charges dropped (*Observer*, March 15, June 28, 1995). Mailei was charged under the *Criminal Act* with two counts of speaking seditious words and two of publishing seditious libel. Si'ueva was charged with two counts of speaking seditious words and one of publishing seditious libel. The charges originated from events leading up to the March 2 protest march. In court, Magistrate Lussick dismissed all seven charges 'when the prosecution failed to produce any evidence' (*Observer*, June 30, 1995). The magistrate's decision contrasted with the Police Commissioner's earlier remarks that 'the charges were valid and would not be withdrawn by the police' (*Observer*, March 31, 1995). After this court decision, the two men planned to sue the Government for one million tala 'for the unconstitutional way in which we were both charged [with] sedition' (*Observer*, August 4, 1995).

Reflecting upon the sedition case, the leader of the opposition SNDP, in an article in the *Observer* (June 30, 1995) said: 'It was an attempt to portray the *Tumua* and *Pule* movement as a real threat to law and order. The objective was to discourage the local council of churches and those who are supporting or sympathetic from a more public demonstration of support for the *Tumua* and *Pule* movement. Additionally it was intended to distract attention from the acute economic problems and corruption raised in the Auditor's report. The tight government control on TV and radio, combined with the fact that the constituency is relatively uninformed, ensure impact and effectiveness of the message, i.e., that the *Tumua* and *Pule* movement is a threat to law and order.'

From a democratic perspective, there were important political gains arising from the *TPA* demonstrations and the sedition charges that resulted from them. One

of them was well depicted in an *Observer* (June 28, 1995) editorial on the day the sedition charges were heard in court: 'For this hearing will set a standard by which future court cases of this kind will be judged ... It will serve as a powerful indicator to the nation of the amount of freedom we can really expect to have in the future.' In other words, the sedition charges were the ultimate test of the individual rights provisions in the Constitution. The *TPA* legal victory was significant particularly in a situation where one political party had a large majority in Parliament, such that its power and political influence could appear to be unlimited. Yet against such power, and within a modern political system that coexists with an indigenous one, the indigenous system is now the last resort for checking that power.

The publicity generated by these developments was another milestone in educating the voting public and creating an awareness among them of the political importance of government policies. The demonstrations in February 1965 and mid-1981 were by wage and salary earners. This section of the public, in 1994, comprised only 13 per cent of the national population. The *TPA* was a 'national' protest movement, as everyone was affected by the VAGST. Ironically, the Public Service Association (PSA) did not join the protest as an organisation, although its members were not prevented from joining as individuals. The introduction of the VAGST had reduced income taxes substantially. Some 19,000 people were exempted from income tax because their salaries were below T100 a week (*Observer*, June 9, 1995). For the purpose of this argument, the manner in which the Head of State dealt with the *TPA* petition — having it referred to the Executive Council, which is a constitutional body comprising the Head of State and cabinet — demonstrated again the value of abiding by the democratic process. It helped cooled off the anger of the protesters and at the same brought about decisions on several issues the protesters had raised.

## **Political leadership**

The late Tofilau Eti Alesana, the HRPP leader and Prime Minister from April 1982 until his retirement in 1998 because of ill health, is credited with his party's political success in the polls because of his astute leadership skills. The following party political events under his leadership testify to this claim. After the defection of 11 HRPP MPs in 1985 to form a coalition government with Efi's opposition supporters — thereby defeating the HRPP Government's 1986 budget — the HRPP came up with a party-pledge system to keep HRPP MPs bound to the party. MPs who had signed their consent to the pledge system would be fined T50,000 if they left the party. Since then, no one has left the party. In the 1988 general elections, the HRPP desperately needed one more HRPP supporter in order to win government back from the coalition. After the results were known, Alesana managed to convince one of the MPs who contested the elections under the coalition ticket to switch party allegiance on the eve of the prime ministerial

elections in Parliament. Alesana and his party successfully wrested the reins of power from the Coalition Government and the MP who defected from the opposition camp was chosen as a minister in the new cabinet.

In government, Alesana passed two important pieces of legislation. The *Parliamentary Under-Secretary's Act 1988* gave Parliament the power to appoint parliamentary undersecretaries. Nine such appointments were made, thus guaranteeing political rewards for another nine HRPP caucus members for their support of the prime minister's party. The prime minister and the eight ministers in his cabinet were each given a parliamentary undersecretary. After securing a two-thirds majority in Parliament to amend the Constitution in 1991 after the general elections, Alesana passed a constitutional amendment to increase from eight to 12 the number of ministers in cabinet, each of whom was entitled to a parliamentary undersecretary. With 13 ministers in cabinet including the prime minister and 13 parliamentary undersecretaries, the HRPP already had the guaranteed support of 26 MPs. In a Parliament of 49 seats, the HRPP would already have the support of the majority. Political experience has been that the issue of appointments to cabinet would make or break parliamentary support. Alesana consistently argued that the defection of the 11 HRPP MPs to form the coalition government had arisen out of unhappiness with his selection of HRPP MPs to be in his cabinet. Four of those who defected became ministers in the coalition cabinet, under Kolone as Prime Minister.

There have been times in the past when the Government found it hard to work with the Public Service. One example was the PSA strike, which lasted for three months in 1981. The Government was powerless to control the public servants. Arguably, this strike helped put the HRPP in government in the general elections the next year. Mindful of these recent events, the HRPP passed the *Special Posts Act 1990*. It transferred from the Public Service Commission (PSC) to cabinet the right to appoint heads of government ministries and corporations on a two-year contract basis. It was a subtle way of obtaining HRPP support from among the senior public servants and holders of corporate positions and through them the political support of lower-ranked employees.

When Alesana sensed that his party would probably lose the 1991 general elections because it had not been able to do enough in terms of improving the condition of roads, he introduced universal suffrage in the 1991 elections after a positive vote in a referendum that was conducted on the issue in the previous year. At the time, only the *matai* (chiefs) had the right to vote in parliamentary elections. The HRPP was ushered back into power, winning 32 of Parliament's 47 seats (So'o and Fraenkel 2005).

Alesana's leadership style had been severely criticised by the opposition party and the public generally. In the early 1990s when the report of the Controller and Chief Auditor was tabled in Parliament, it pointed to possible corruption in

high places. It created embarrassment for the Government. As a consequence of the political debate arising from this report, the HRPP Government passed a constitutional amendment which limited the term of the Controller and Chief Auditor to a contract of three years, in line with heads of other government corporations whose appointments were made under the *Special Post Act 1990*. At the time, the appointment of the Controller and Chief Auditor was a constitutional one for a term of 60 years, which was basically for life (Constitution Art. 97.3). The new amendment gave the Government the power to not renew the contract of a Controller and Chief Auditor after three years. The controversial Controller and Chief Auditor, whose report to Parliament created much animosity between the Government and the opposition and some sections of the community, was given the right to apply for his old job under the new conditions. He chose not to apply.

In the late 1990s, while Alesana was Prime Minister, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, Tupua Tamasese 'Efi, lodged a petition with the Supreme Court complaining that his party had been prevented from having air time on television and the government-controlled radio station, thereby preventing the public from knowing about its views. When Alesana passed away in 1999, his successor, Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi, took over the leadership and therefore became the main defender of Tamasese 'Efi's complaint in the court. The court ruled in favour of 'Efi. Yet despite the controversial nature of the two cases already described and the negative media publicity they generated, they did not seem to affect the political status of the HRPP as it was brought back to power in the 1996 general elections, having won 27 of the 49 seats in Parliament. Despite these controversial issues under Alesana's leadership, he and the HRPP clearly retained the voting public's support.

The political success of Alesana's party can also be explained by projects it was able to complete throughout its time in office. The electrification program in the 1980s took electricity to about 90 per cent of homes. The country's first national television station was opened in 1993. The National University of Samoa was opened to its foundation class in 1984 and has since developed into a fully fledged university with five faculties, an Institute of Samoan Studies and the appointment of its first three professors in 2004. There has been intensive work on water infrastructure and access roads for plantation agriculture. The old-age pension, though meagre by overseas standards, has not only given T100 a month to those who are 65 years and over, it has made that section of the population feel important. The establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs on the eve of the introduction of universal suffrage recognised the contribution of women to the development of the country. It was also a gesture that earned for the HRPP the respect and political support of women throughout the country, who in turn contributed to the electoral success of the HRPP in the polls in the general elections the next year.

Equally important, if not the most important variable, in the HRPP's ability to create and maintain political stability in Samoa is the local culture, which is generally referred to as *fa'a Samoa* (the Samoan way). An editorial in the most-read local newspaper, *The Samoa Observer* (September 2, 2005), tried to describe the contribution of Samoan culture to political stability:

***Fa'a Samoa* prevents political upheavals**

Though Samoa, Tonga and Fiji have a lot of cultural similarities, Samoa's social structure has always been less stratified than its neighbours. Power and prestige in Tonga is exclusive to its royal family and the King's nobles. The rest of the population are deemed to be 'commoners', locked in an age-old role of servitude. Fiji's chiefly system is similar, in which one is born a *Ratu* or *Adi*. On the other hand, rank and status in Samoa have always been owed to personal merit and achievement. Title accession is largely the prerogative of the *aiga*, family. While chiefly titleholders have authority, real power remains with the family. Power broking, many would argue, has been the domain of silver-tongued orators who are always on the lookout to elevate their *ali'i's* status, thus their own. Often when Tongans speak of their King, Samoans respond: 'In Samoa everyone is a king (and queen).' This is based on *fa'a Samoa's* emphasis on *matai* titles and genealogy. It is a culture that embraces interpersonal relations. Every Samoan has access to any number of *matai* titles and all titles are interconnected through lineage. Dig deep enough and one will find every Samoan is related, many times, in many ways.

Furthermore, Samoa, unlike Tonga and Fiji, has never had any form of central government. It always existed as fiercely independent states, which in modern times have been termed districts. The states were a cluster of relatively autonomous villages: *Fa'alenu'u*, village polity, being the embryonic fabric of *fa'a Samoa*. Though there are paramount titles particular to each district, many times the titleholder is powerful only as far as his ability to gain the full support of his district villages and form allegiances with other districts. Will Samoans one day reject the *tama-a-'äiga* as some observers ask? As long as Samoa practises its culture and holds dear its intricate familial connections, it will never happen.

**Nafanua**

Set to wage war on Lea'ea i Sasa'e district, which had been enslaving her people, the war goddess Nafanua was advised by her mother, Tilafaiga, 'A pa'ia le pa i Fualaga, sua le tuli aua le Ali'ioaiga' (When you reach the pa at Fualaga, stop the killing in respect to the Ali'ioaiga — this is in reference to Siali'itu, who resided at Faia'ai village, some accounts say, and was a brother of Tilafaiga). It was said to be one of the

bloodiest wars in Samoa but Nafanua's clubs were never wielded beyond Fualaga. Even in times of war, Samoa's family connections are upheld.

It is personal respect among Samoans because of family connections, among other considerations, that makes Samoans think twice before involving themselves in activities that could contribute to or result in political upheaval. As one doctor who has served in the national hospital for 56 years has recalled of a planned strike by the doctors in the past because of salary issues: 'The strike was averted when the Head of State, His Highness Malietoa Tanumafili II, intervened. He came to the hospital, sat down with the doctors and asked for the strike to be called off. What can the doctors do, this was the Head of State? Out of respect, no strike took place' (*The Samoa Observer*, September 6, 2005). The HRPP succeeded in preventing open conflict by appealing to and taking advantage of those cultural elements.

## Conclusion

Political stability has been a feature of the HRPP regime, which began in 1982, when it first became the government, until the present. Several factors have contributed to this state of affairs. The existence of a still vibrant indigenous sociopolitical system alongside Samoa's introduced liberal democratic system adopted before independence in 1962 means that Samoans will always revert to their indigenous political system in difficult political situations as the only means by which to check political dominance and what is perceived by the public as abuse of power. Powerless to check the political dominance of the HRPP regime since it first took office in early 1982, the indigenous sociopolitical institutions of *Tumua* and *Pule* and *'Aiga* organised a series of protest marches against the government in the early 1990s. However, tactful political leadership in a highly sensitive situation in which the *TPA* protest marches played a determining role averted the possibility of serious violent confrontation between HRPP and anti-HRPP protesters.

Because *fa'a Samoa* creates obligations between relatives in a country where almost everyone is related, it has the effect of dampening the potential for instability. For example, even though some voters might have been unhappy with the way the HRPP had been running the country, they would not be prepared to have those political sentiments translated into voting out the sitting HRPP MP in their respective constituencies if the MP was a relative of theirs. Respect for others, especially for those of traditional rank, also discourages extremism and instability.

Samoa has been unusually successful, compared with Fiji and Tonga, at blending the modern parliamentary system of representation with cultural tradition. Since 1962, when Samoa became independent, there have not been any major amendments to its constitution. Nor have there been any constitutional crises

in Samoa like those that resulted in the Fiji coups of 1987 and 2000, or the continuing constitutional problems of Tonga. Any constitutional amendments in Samoa have been relatively minor and have been achieved through constitutional, democratic and legal means.

Finally, HRPP's twofold political strategy of formulating and implementing policies that have helped keep it united, and changing the rules through legislation introduced in Parliament during its period in office, have contributed to the party's electoral success. This success, in turn, has led ultimately to the maintenance of political stability in Samoa.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> These included a vote during the general elections, a vote of no-confidence against the Government in Parliament, the resignation of the Prime Minister or his absence from the country without having first consulted the Head of State (*Observer*, March 1, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> A government-appointed commission of inquiry, which was set up 'to look into allegations in the report to allow those implicated the chance to defend themselves', 'downplayed the report and exonerated most of those implicated in it' (*Observer*, July 15, 1994; January 13, 1995). Substantial sections of the Chief Auditor's report had been published in the *Observer* (July 15, 22, 1994).