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# Prometheus on the Fortunate Isles

- A Human Ecological Study on Environment, Culture and  
Identity in Samoa

A Minor Field Study, September-November 2010



From 1892 until 2011, the International Date Line passed west of Samoa, but at the end of the year, Samoa switched sides, jumping forward by one day. However, at the time of our field study in 2010, this was still the place of the last sunset of the world. Photo by Louise Nevander 2010.

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## Abstract

The thesis is centered around an eight week long minor field study conducted on the Polynesian Islands of Samoa in 2010. Samoa is one of the worlds least developed countries according to the UN. However; people do not starve in Samoa. In Samoa, most land is still communaly owned, and every Samoan has through family ties access to so called customary lands. Moreover, customary land is *inalienable* in Samoa, that is, it cannot be bought or sold.

In 2008, the government of Samoa introduced a new bill concerning registration of customary lands, the LTRA 2008. The registration of customary lands opens up for the possibility of abandoning the inalienable status of the customary lands. Regarding this, some people have expressed a fear that this change in the system of land ownership will not only lead to an abandonment of the customary land system, but also to the abandonment of the traditional Samoan culture and system of sharing, the *Fa'a Samoa*, since the sharing of land and resources is percieved as being the heart of the cultural system, also referred to as a *system of belonging*.

In the study the emotions and associations that underlie how Samoans relate to land are investigated, and how these might change given an introduction of Western land ownership concepts. Also the consequenses of such a change are discussed.

The results of the study show that Samoans are psychologically more connected to their land and environment than Westerners, that is, not to nature in a general sense, but to a *specific* environment, to place, to a *specific* piece of land, to a *physically identifiable* place or piece of land. In a psychological sense, they *belong*, they are rooted in a way that we in the West are generally not. Moreover, with the implementation of LTRA 2008, customary lands might become alienable.

The main conclusions drawn from the study are that there is a *difference* between being connected to a specific environment and being connected to nature in general, and that the possibility of alienation of customary lands has the potential of offsetting a fundamental transformation of how Samoans relate to and deal with land issues and also of the Samoan society and culture as a whole. If customary lands become alienable, Samoans risk losing their connectedness with a *specific* piece of land. If so, they will become more *alienated* from their environment, from their culture, and also from their identity as *Samoans*.

## 1. General introduction

It is an expression of great poverty when people need lots of possessions, because it proves that they lack the things that are of the Great Spirit.

- *Samoa high chief Tuiavii* (Scheurmann 1988: 62; our translation)

Samoa is one of the worlds least developed countries (UN 2015a), and had an annual GDP Per Capita (Current Prices, US Dollars) of US\$ 3607.5 (GDP 2012, UN 2015b). The Pacific Islands is the region in the world that receives most foreign aid per capita (United Nations Development System in Fiji and Samoa 2008: 9). Yet no one is hungry in Samoa and no one lacks a roof over their head. This fact is what evoked our interest in these faraway Polynesian islands.

Samoa is one of the last places in the world where land is still communal (81 % 2002) (Ye 2010: 832) and where material goods, such as mobile phones, in large are considered communal property as well and continuously circulated in the community. Children are handled in the same way, considered a communal responsibility. The economical culture is relatively egalitarian and based on gift-giving. Status within the community is acquired through the act of giving - a powerful man has to give more. Samoa is also a traditional society governed by chiefs and village councils according to the cultural concept of *Fa'a Samoa, the Samoan Way* (Tcherkézoff 2008: 247f). *Fa'a Samoa* is an important part of the national identity, which is affirmed by a strong sense of pride, as exemplified by Samoans commonly referring to their homeland as “the heart of Polynesia”, or simply “Paradise” (several informants). Situated in the tropical hemisphere, the soil of Samoa is extremely fertile and cultivated along the coastlines with inland forest areas utilized for garden horticulture of fruits and for gathering of plants. The geographical isolation of the islands ensures that the land has been sustainably used long before the Europeans discovered the islands, the islands being self-sufficient in food and with most Samoans having direct access to the agricultural yields of their lands (Va'a, pers.comm.).

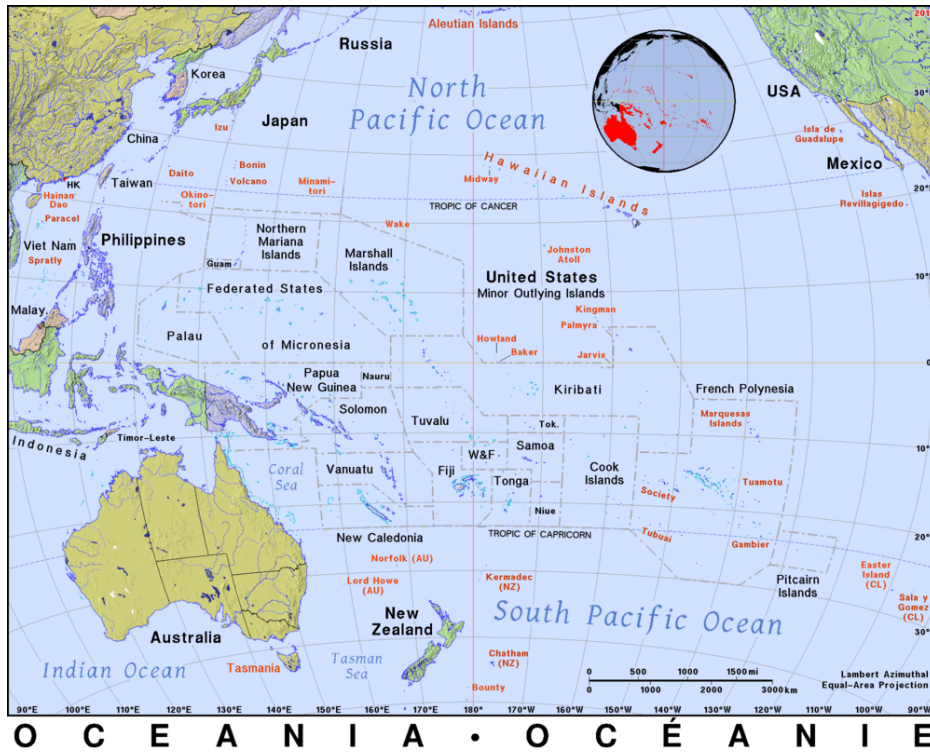
As human ecologists, we are critical of the concept of "development" and its application in the discourse of international relations as it often comes across as an unconscious judgement of cultural advancement or inferiority.

As researchers, we are interested in meeting another culture, starting not from the assumption of giving advice or assistance but from the perspective of, through cooperation and dialogue, gathering knowledge of the other culture, our own culture, ourselves and ultimately of our common world.

We both share an interest in the economics and the psychology of an ecologically sustainable society and of its relation to social justice. We think that many people in Western countries look for alternative models of society and relationships to nature, among all the apocalyptic scenarios of ecological crisis; rising sea levels, eutrophication, soil salinization, soil erosions and spreading deserts, shrinking forests, ecosystem collapse, diminishing biodiversity, pollution, water scarcity, natural disasters and hunger.

We first came across Samoa in lectures held by Oceania specialist Professor Thomas Malm, who evoked our interest through vivid presentations of the traditional culture of Samoa. He led us to the Norwegian writer and activist Erik Damman, who in the book *Talofa Samoa!* describes his lifechanging stay in the Samoan society during the 70's and 80's (Damman 1983).

The lush tropical forests, sandy beaches, the coconut palms and the smiling, friendly and elegantly elusive people that have fascinated sailors, missionaries and anthropologists for more than two hundred years also lured itself into our minds. It all illustrates the Paradisian dream that the Pacific islands also are to Westerners.



Samoa in its region, public domain map from Macky 2015.



Map of Samoa, public domain map from *The World Factbook* 2013-14.



## 1.1. Background

In Samoa land is *inalienable*, that is, cannot be bought or sold by both law and custom (Ye 2010: 848). This concept is rooted deeply in Samoan culture and identity, and is according to Tcherkézoff (2008: 281) linked to the perception of Samoans and many other South Pacific people, that the land owns the people and not, like in Western perceptions, the other way around. The land is named after and belongs to an ancestor, and the descendants of that ancestor have the right to use the land and its yields and to decide upon the use of the land. The ancestor can ultimately be traced back to the divine (Tcherkézoff 2008:281). The name of the ancestor is an honorary title that is bestowed upon the chief chosen by the extended family, whose members are the descendants of that ancestor. 81% of the land in Samoa is customary land and thus treated in this way.

Acquisition of land in developing countries by foreign governments, corporations and other investors, so called land-grabbing, is a growing phenomenon. To help prevent this, organizations like SIDA (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) supports reforms concerning land legislation on a national level in developing countries.

SIDA also suggests that formal registration of ownership is crucial for the enforcement of poor people's right to defend their land and resources from land-grabbing (SIDA 2011).

Changing the inalienable status of land into making land a good that can be sold and bought is crucial to investment security (Tcherkézoff 2008:284), thereby attracting foreign investors, which by certain international organizations and aid donors is considered as necessary to create development and economic growth in Samoa (UN 2015c).

In 2008 the government of Samoa introduced a new law enforcing a new type of registration of land, the "Land Titles Registration Act 2008", further on in this thesis referred to as the LTRA. The LTRA introduces the Torrens system in Samoa, a system of land registration which uses property concepts that are at

odds with the Samoan way of thinking of and dealing with land issues (Ye 2010). When the LTRA is implemented, there is a risk that the customary lands in Samoa become converted into freehold land, something that would be inconsistent with the Samoan constitution and with tradition (Ye 2010). According to Professor Va'a at the Center for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa, the popular view was that the LTRA was a result of pressure by international financial institutions and aid donor countries (Va'a 2009). Although the Prime Minister Tuilaepa sustains that the LTRA will have no impact on the rights to customary lands (Tuilaepa pers.comm.), politicians of the opposition argue that the LTRA will be the death of the *Fa'a Samoa* (Va'a 2009, Taua 2009).

## 1.2. Aim and purpose

Our aim in this report is to analyze the effects of the Land Titles Registration Act 2008 on culture, identity and sustainability in Samoa.

Hereby we wish to contribute to a deeper understanding of how distribution and ownership of land affect sustainability, culture and identity, with a specific focus on how land regulation effects the co-evolution of varying degrees of alienation and ecological, cultural and psychological sustainability. Our Minor Field Study in Samoa is a case study of these relations.

## 1.3. Problem formulation

We share the view that the conception of land as *alienable*, that is, as a human property that can be sold and bought at will and used without such restrictions as taboos or moral obligations, and to which is attached clearly defined property rights and an identifiable owner, is a prerequisite for the Western lifestyle of high material standard and economic growth, and also for development as the word is intended by U.N. and Western foreign aid institutions. We also adhere to the view that high material standard paired with exponential economic growth by definition result in environmental degradation, resource scarcity and

ecological crisis (Daly 1991). Also belonging to that Western framework is a perception of land as an unanimated object, a purely material good, void of subjectivity, agency and purpose, and of powers of intention, which constitutes the underlying psychological rationale for exploiting and overexploiting land and natural resources (Merchant 1994).

Human ecological research is structured around the theory that human-environmental relations is a triangular system, with the person, society and nature each representing one of the corners of the triangle. Changes in one corner imply changes in the other two. Since the Land Titles Registration Act 2008 constitutes a legal change, that is, a societal change, in Samoa, the theory dictates consequential changes in the Samoans' psychological connection to land and in the handling of the natural environment of Samoa, effecting ecological sustainability.

Our research questions are therefore as follows:

- 1. What associations and emotions, conscious and unconscious, underlie how Samoans relate to land?**
- 2. In what ways can the changes in land regulation implemented in the Land Titles Registration Act 2008 effect the psychological affects to land in Samoa?**

#### **1.4. Hypotheses**

1. Given the connection of land to a semidivine ancestor by means of a shared name it seems plausible to assume that the land is inhabited by the spiritual remains of the ancestor, and that the presence perceived as being the ancestor in the land grants the land a degree of spiritual protection. This links the question of land use to considerations of moral and ethical responsibility. The land is *animated*, and cannot be treated as a purely material object.

Such systems of belief and practice have been common in many cultures in different parts of the world as well as in earlier historical epochs in the Western world (Eliade 1961, Levi-Strauss 1971).

2. Registering the land under the title of an individual legally transfers the authority over land to that individual, and even if custom holds it that he should represent the will of the whole family and not only his own, and law makes it possible to remove his title, that is, the name, from him and appoint another family member to the title, the legal change still affects and possibly shifts the balance of power within the family, legally and probably also psychologically. If the LTRA de facto legally can be used to change the status of customary lands into freehold lands, sell-offs of family land in Samoa may take place. In this case the LTRA means the abandoning of the inalienable status of customary land in Samoa, thereby abandoning the lifetime-security concerning food and housing that Samoans have.

This could be of interest both to individual chiefs and foreign investors, given the possibility of developing tourism in Samoa. The Land Titles Registration Act 2008 could be interpreted as a step in a process that is sustained by strong incentives of economical nature, and the logical conclusion of which is to abandon the inalienable status of Samoan customary land. The alienation of Samoan land would arguably have a strong impact on the Samoan people, changing their psychological affects to land, making them more similar to those of Western people.

### **1.5. Scope**

In this report we will not analyze the juridical details of the Land Titles Registration Act 2008 since we lack the competence and the knowledge of traditions and practice in the Samoan legal system. Instead we will depart from the accounts of the Prime Minister, who was a main proponent of the Act, and from the director of the environmental NGO the Siosiomaga society, Fiu Matai

Elisara, who passed on to us the interpretation of the Act done by a lawyer of the organization, and from the articles of the lawyer and journalist writing under the name of F.S. Taua, both of them known opponents of the LTRA. Further, we will rely on the paper by Ye (2010), Barrister and Solicitor of the High Court of New Zealand.

We will not investigate the ecological sustainability of Samoa ourselves in our field study, but will rely on the statements of field Unasa Va'a, Associate Professor at the Institute for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa concerning the sustainability of the cultivation of the land in Samoa.

## **1.6. Disposition**

The first chapter is a general introduction to the subject and object of the study, and includes the problem formulation and the research questions. In the second chapter central theoretical frameworks and concepts will be defined, thereamong concepts such as alienation, systems theory and cybernetics, along with theories regarding land, myth and ritual. In the third chapter a background on the Samoan system will be provided. In chapter four the method and the type of material used in the study is presented. Chapter five provides a presentation of the results of the field study. In chapter six the results of the study and the implications of those results are discussed. Chapter seven includes a summary of the main conclusions that have been drawn from the study.

## **2. Definition of central theoretical frameworks and concepts**

In this thesis we will structure our analysis of our research questions around three fundamental theoretical concepts or frameworks, using them as principal methodological tools and starting points for our analysis: the human ecological triangle, the concept of alienation and systems theory or cybernetics. Moreover,

we will analyse our research questions in the light of several theories concerning land, ritual and myth.

### 2.1. The human ecological triangle

The object of study of human ecology are the human-environmental relations as these are constituted in different societies and cultures in different historical epochs. The analysis of the human-environmental relations is structured around the analytical framework of the *human ecological triangle*, with the individual or person, society and nature each representing one of the corners of the triangle, and relations between the corners being recursive and non-hierarchical (Hornborg: 2001: 193).

The exact relations between the corners is a matter of discussion inside the field of human ecology (compare Weichart 1993: 78, referring to Steiner's comment that the sides, not the corners, symbolizes the basic problems of human ecology).

A human ecological analysis of the above mentioned relations also intend a specific interest for sustainability and the impact of diverse subsistence systems on the three corners of the triangle. The human ecological triangle is our point of reference in defining *what* it is that we analyse.

To understand human-environmental relations and the problem of sustainability, human ecology draws on research from many different academic fields, most importantly combining disciplines from natural sciences, social sciences and humanities.

### 2.2. Alienation

We define alienation as a *feeling of isolation*, that might be from other people, the surrounding society or culture, nature or environment, or from (parts of) oneself. We consider alienation a fundamental problem of human existence,

appearing on all levels of human-environmental relations. We draw on the research from scholars of many different disciplines. The sociologists Tönnies, Weber and Giddens respectively speak of contractual, disinterested relations as characterizing society in opposition to community (Tönnies, 1957), of decontextualisation as a sense of cosmic isolation resulting in enhanced economic activity (Weber 1978) and of a permanent process creating alienation in modern societies through cutting and undermining social relations, so called disembeddedness (Giddens 1990). The anthropologists Hornborg, Malm and Ingold respectively discuss embeddedness versus disembeddedness in different cultural contexts (Hornborg 2001), identifies a "cultural void" when cultural context disappears without being substituted by meaningful new patterns (Malm, *De svarta pärlornas ö*, 2003), and defines differences in the relationship to nature in different cultures as variations in capacity of attention, calling this capacity of attention "skill" (Ingold 2000).

In Western culture, the phenomena of alienation has been analyzed by several scholars of social sciences in the guise of the so called *cartesian divide*, which can be defined as a fundamental sensation of non-identity between the thinking individual mind and his surroundings, most adamantly expressed by 17th century philosopher René Descartes.

Marx used the concept of alienation to describe the estranged feeling of the worker towards the product that is only partly produced by him, and characterizes alienation as the dominant feeling between humans in a capitalistic economy (Marx, 1961-1962 (1867)). The cultural historian Merchant analyses the view of Nature as a mechanical entity separated from us as well as the process of de-animating it during Western history (Merchant 1994) and the historian of religions Eliade talks of modernity as a process of emptying nature of meaning, so called desacralization (Eliade 1961).

The depth psychologists Fromm, Jung and Estés explore the social isolation between people in society as a root cause of totalitarian political movements (Fromm 1945), and the concept of rationality as an individual's internal alienation from the unconscious in the psyche (Jung 1953-1979) as well as the phenomena of "losing one's soul" when giving up personally deeply meaningful values or activities (Estés 1998).

## 2.3. Systems theory and cybernetics

In this thesis, we will apply systems theory and cybernetics when we talk of systems such as the human psyche, human culture, their ecological environment or the combination of the three.

Systems theory is an interdisciplinary study of systems in general with the aim of clarifying principles that can be applied to all types of systems. In systems theory, the object of study is generally systems which are self-regulated, a concept which will be discussed further down.

Also cybernetics is an interdisciplinary approach for studying systems and their structures, which concentrates on systems containing signaling feedback loops, which also will be discussed in the next section.

### 2.3.1. Defining the concept of a system

When discussing systems theory and cybernetics, we need to define what we mean by a system. Firstly, we define a system by defining its boundaries. In other words, we, as observers, choose to look at certain phenomena or set of variables which in turn determines what is inside of a system and what is outside. A system can be a part of another, bigger system or overlap with another system. A system is further, in Rappaport's words, "any set of specified variables in which a change in the value of one of the variables will result in a change in the value of at least one other variable." (Rappaport 1968: 4). This means a system is a set of somehow interconnected parts.

The system may or may not interact with its surrounding environment. One of the most obvious examples of a system interacting with its surrounding environment is a living system importing energy (exergy) due to its dissipative structure (Prigogine & Nicolis 1977), or the earth receiving energy (exergy) from the sun. However, in fulfilling its purpose or function, a system is autonomous. It exhibits processes that fulfill those purposes or functions. Typically, an act inside



a system will cause some type of change also in its surrounding environment, and the change will be fed back to the system in the form of information that will cause the system to adapt to the new conditions, that is, the change in the system will affect the behaviour of that same system.

Some changes are so radical or have such radical consequences or implications in a system that they, suddenly or eventually, lead to *system collapse*. By a system collapse, we mean that a system can not prevail in the way we have chosen to describe it, with the components we have defined as its important parts, within the boundaries which we have chosen. In an ecosystem, the death of a what ecologists call a *keystone species* could lead to such a collapse (Miller 2009: 95). The concept of keystone species is derived from a parable of a stone archway with a wedge-shaped stone placed at its top (Miller 2009: 95). When removing the stone, the arch collapses (Miller 2009: 95). An example of a keystone species helping to sustain an ecosystem are bees pollinating flowering plants (Miller 2009: 95).

Keystone species, in other words, have large effects concerning what types and in what abundance those types may exist, since loss of a keystone species can lead to population crashes, extinctions of other species and system collapse (Miller 2009: 95).

A system is not static, but can outlast certain amounts of changes. For each of the interlinked variables in a system, there is an upper and a lower level or threshold of tolerance, between which the variable can oscillate, while still permitting the continued existence of the system (Bateson et al. 1998: 89f). A change can thus be digested or accepted inside the system through moderation, compensation or balancing of other variables oscillating between their respective thresholds or limits. In this way, the system is *adaptive* (compare Rappaport's concept of so called regulating mechanisms, 1968: 4). This ability of a living system to survive moderate disturbances is called *inertia* or *persistence* by Miller (2009: 119). Another way for a system to survive moderate disturbances is, according to Miller (2009: 119), by restoration of the system through secondary succession, so called resilience, which, when talking about ecological systems, means the

reestablishment of plants and species of animals et cetera where the soil or bottom sediment still prevails. Inertia or persistence and resilience are thus aspects of *stability* in the system (Miller 2009: 119).

If a variable is stressed closed to its limit of tolerance, the flexibility concerning that variable is lowered (Bateson et al. 1998: 89f). However, since the parts or variables of a system are interconnected, a loss of flexibility in one variable often implies a loss of flexibility in the whole system, since the other variables hardly can oscillate within the scope of their limits without pushing the stressed variable beyond its limit of tolerance (Bateson et al. 1998:89f). Thereby, a loss of flexibility concerning one variable can easily spread through the system (Bateson et al. 1998:89f). This implies that a system which is already stressed will be more intolerant (that is, in Miller's terms, less persistent or resilient) even when it comes to smaller changes, and thereby more likely to collapse (compare Millers description of a system reaching a tipping point, where any additional stress can cause the system to change in an abrupt, possibly irreversible way - a collapse, Miller, 2009: 119).

Concerning ecosystems, the upper limit or threshold up to which a variable can oscillate sans collapse is given by the ecosystem's *carrying capacity*, meaning the maximum number of individuals and individuals within each species that can be supported indefinitely by the prevailing system (Miller 2009: 110). Passing the threshold of a variable, that is, pressuring an ecosystem beyond its carrying capacity, will lead to its collapse, in the sense that the system will come to a new equilibrium. The features of such an equilibrium, and whether it can sustain the same species, are uncertain (compare MacArthur and Wilsons species equilibrium model, as presented in Miller 2009: 90).

Generally, an ecosystem containing many different species, that is, a species-rich or diverse ecosystem, is considered by ecologists to be more stable (Miller s. 90). This is because the system, because of its many varieties in the web of feeding and in its biotic interactions, has more ways to respond to environmental stresses (Miller 2009: 91). In short, as Miller (2009: 91) states, "it does not have

‘all its eggs in one basket’’. This could be compared to Bateson’s reasoning concerning general ideas or notions on which a civilization is built. According to Bateson, those ideas or notions make their presence through people’s actions and in their interaction with others, conscious or unconscious and more or less defined (Bateson et al. 1998: 92). Bateson argues that the ideas or notions are interlinked, partly through some sort of psycho-logic and partly through a common consensus on the quasi-concrete effect of certain actions (Bateson et al. 1998: 92f). He argues that while individual links in the web of ideas and actions often are weak, every given idea or action is controlled by, or better, submitted to, multiple points of control through interconnected loops (Bateson et al. 1998: 92f). He draws the parable that when going to bed, we turn off the light partly due to the idea of sleeping undisturbed, partly for economical reasons, partly to reduce sensory impressions and partly simply because someone taught us to do so (Bateson et al. 1998: 92f).

A system can also include so called *negative feedback loops*. This means it functions in the way that, as Rappaport (1968: 4) puts it “a change in the value of a variable itself initiates a process that either limits further change or returns the value to a former level”. The typical example of this phenomenon is a thermostat; whenever the temperature increase above the set limit, the bimetal reacts and turns a switch off so that the heating turns off (Rappaport 1968: 4). A system containing negative feedback loops can be said to be *self-regulating* or *homeostatic* (Rappaport 1968: 4). Regarding the system of person-society-environment relations, Rappaport (1968: 4) proposes that *ritual* functions as a set of mechanisms that regulates the relations in this system, that is, it functions as a sort of thermostat concerning the relations described in the human ecological triangle.

As we saw, the collapse of a key species in an ecosystem can, on the other hand, create a domino effect, which leads to the collapse of other species and potentially the collapse of the whole system (compare also Miller 2009: 255). The opposite of a negative feedback loop is a *positive feedback loop*, which functions the other way around. A change in a variable in a system would in this

case spread through the system only to be reinforced or amplified. One unfortunate event could thereby set off a positive feedback loop that leads to a system collapse (Bateson 1987: 334).

### 2.3.2. Defining a “system collapse”

Then, how do we differ between a change that permits the continued existence of the system, and a change that leads to a system collapse? Even though systems are clearly not static and rather ever-changing, the idea is that their identity is essentially maintained even though it goes through smaller changes; it can still be described in the way that we have chosen to describe it, with the components we have defined as its important parts, within the boundaries which we have chosen. It is still recognizable and variables can vary within their certain limits, also with the plausibility of the system returning to a state very similar to a former state. The crucial point here is that a collapse is irreversible (compare Moore’s lecture 2010: “What is the difference between being on the verge of a crisis and between a crisis? A crisis is irreversible”), that is, there is a thermodynamical timeline in the process (compare Heylighen 1992 concerning thermodynamics and cybernetics). After a collapse, there is no possibility of going back to a *certain former state* or a state very similar to a certain former state, that is to a *recognizable* state - recognizable in the meaning of our definition of the system - in the system. Thus, the system does no longer match our description of it. Instead, the only way to in any way restore the system is to start over from scratch, what Miller (2009: 116), when talking about ecosystems, calls a *primary succession*. An example of a primary succession is when an essentially lifeless area, such as an abandoned parking lot, where there is no soil or, if an aquatic system, bottom sediment, in a usually *very slow step by step process* becomes inhabited by different species eventually forming an ecosystem (Miller 2009: 116). This implies that to fight off the higher entropy we have to add significantly more energy (exergy) than was needed to just sustain the system. Thus, drawing an example of a computer system, a system restoration to a certain point in time is no longer possible (Bateson 1998: 89f), but instead, one

must rebuild the whole computer. This implies that the fix is no longer possible from within or inside the system, but instead at a higher logical type level (compare Bateson (1987: 183-198) on logical types).

#### 2.4. Land, ritual and myth

In many cultures restrictions such as moral and ethical judgements and psychological inhibitions as well as cultural and social norms, sometimes in the form of taboos, pose strong regulation on what the people owning or using the land may or may not do. Rappaport points out that localized and seemingly irrational, unscientific practises such as myth, ritual and religion in indigenous societies sometimes codify ecological knowledge and promote an ecologically sustainable living, often functioning as activators of powerful emotions of connectedness and respect towards other animate beings and unanimated objects in the environment and towards the environments itself (Rappaport, 1968: 3). Myth and ritual practices have, according to Rappaport (1968: 2f), both internal functions, that is psychological or sociological functions such as dispelling anxieties and disciplining social organization, *and* external functions, that is, they practically regulate the relationship to the environment and thus has *empirically measurable effects*. (Rappaport 1968: 4)

Lévi-Strauss demonstrated that people in “primitive” cultures have the same level of abstract thinking and possess the same intellectual capacities as the “civilised” Western people. He considers myth, a form of thought system commonly regulating behaviour and values in “primitive” cultures, to be a form of speech that codify deeply abstract, empirically derived social knowledge about psychological meanings (Levi-Strauss 1971: 23). He also argues that the use of more or less abstract terms in language doesn't reflect intellectual abilities, but rather reflects a difference of attentions, the subjects being differently marked and detailed depending on the interest in that same subject (Levi-Strauss 1971: 14, Det Vilda Tänkandet).

The passage from identification to alienation can be traced in Western history through analysis of cultural phenomena, specifically metaphors. Cultural historian Merchant demonstrates that during the 17th century, the metaphors used to refer to the earth in literature change from names denoting a woman, a living organism, to a mechanical construction, a clock, a giant machine, changing the view of Nature as an active being to a passive being and further to an unanimated object, and that this change opened up for unrestricted exploitation of nature by “permitting” such an exploitation, through the adoption of the premise of treating nature as an “it”, indicating a thing that has no soul, as opposed to as treating Nature as a “She”, indicating a being with a soul (Merchant 1994).

Bateson argues that metaphor might be the best way we as humans have to describe complex natural systems, that they confer an immediate understanding much more effective than “scientific” explanations, and he suggests that metaphor is closely related to perhaps inextricably connected to *empathy* (Bateson 1988: 44), another feeling that we, together with attention, may define as the opposite of alienation. He asks if a story has to have *happened* to be true, and writes that myths are true not in the historical sense but in the sense that they convey a meaning that is true *now*, that is happening inside the listener. They tell important truths about relations or exemplify ideas, and in that, they are true (Bateson 1988: 45).

Karen Armstrong writes that in arcaic cultures mythos was always separated from logos, and interpreted along the lines of being a metaphorical moral or spiritual guide, not as a factual account of historical events (Armstrong 2011: 153-181). She claims that people in arcaic cultures clearly distinguished between mythos and logos and did not interpret myth factually, and that myth thus was considered true in a psychological and spiritual sense, not in a historical or literal way (Armstrong 2011: 153-181).

Eliade speaks of a distinction in the traditional man’s experience of reality between profane time and sacred time and between profane space and sacred

space, the sacred, as opposed to the profane, containing real value (Eliade 1961). To the traditional man, certain parts of his environment is sacred, those places being places where the Sacred has manifested itself, thus being conceived as being inhabited by the Sacred (Eliade 1961). He means that myths, to the traditional man, contain manifestations of the sacred, so called “hierophanies”, and give structure to the world, while to modern man, the sacred time and space has become lost or desacralized because he has denied it, and he must therefore himself create value and meaning in his life (Eliade 1961: 20-22). When, as in a modernization process, myths and rituals are no longer understood for what they are, a manual for reconnecting with the sacred that re-awakes the consciousness that the sacred inhabitates or is inherent in one’s immediate surroundings, the result is a desacralization of the environment surrounding the individuals (Eliade 1961: 203).

Jungian analyst and storyteller Estés argues that a culture is lost when it loses the people of what she names the “the holy class”, that is, writers, storytellers, artists, chroniclers, doctors and priests, who are all to be seen as guardians of knowledge, values and insights on pathology and cure that is culture-specific as well as general (Estés 1998: 460). To defeat a culture, these people need to be liquidated (Estés 1998: 460). In this, she adheres to the view that storytelling and mythology are closely linked to factual processes such as political decisionmaking and medical cure, and that these phenomena are central to the inner, systemic workings of a culture (compare Estés 1998: 72). She refers to the loss of the myths and rituals of a culture as a loss of spiritual roots, and means that this loss psychologically creates sorrow, as well as an unidentified and unguided search for the spirituality lost (Estés 1998: 21-23).

She believes this loss of myths and rituals is accompanied with, and strengthened by, a loss of knowledge of one’s personal family stories from the generations before, as well as by a devastating attack on and destruction of the “wild”, the “wild” in this case referring to inner structures and outer environments that are characterized by what could be described as archaic, biological natural processes uncontrolled by human will, notably, processes

whose basic pattern are periodically recurring cycles of life and death, of fertility, decomposition and renewal (Estés 1998).

### 3. Background on the Samoan system

#### 3.1. Land tenure in Samoa and the Land Titles Registration Act 2008

The Samoan economy is based on agriculture and on remittances from Samoan migrants in Australia, New Zealand and the U.S. Every Samoan living in Samoa has access to land and self-subsistence agriculture (UN 2015c: 14)

There are, in legal view, three types of lands in Samoa: customary land, freehold land and public land (The Samoan Constitution, art 101). Customary land makes up for 81 % of the land, while freehold land and public land varies in different sources from 4-12 %, and respectively 7-15 % (Ye 2010: 832). Our primary interest in this thesis is in *customary land*.

Customary land in Samoa is *inalienable*, that is, cannot be bought or sold or exchanged (Ye 2010: 848).

Customary land was traditionally not subject to any registration system in Samoa (Ye 2010: 843). Whether privatization and registration of lands can improve land productivity and promote economic growth, however, is a matter that has been discussed for decades (Ye 2010: 841). In 2008 the government of Samoa, under a credit from the International Development Association, which is a part of the World Bank, introduced a new bill concerning registration of lands called the "Land Titles Registration Act 2008", the LTRA (Ye 2010: 845f). The new bill was received with "widespread opposition" (Va'a 2009) and had to be amended before being finally passed, the government reassuring the community that it was not to effect customary lands (Ye 2010: 846). Although this is not the first law concerning registration of land that has been passed in Samoa, it is



controversial because the law enforces a new type of registration of land. To understand what the change is about we need to look further to Samoa's social system and traditional system of land tenure.

The Samoan social system, culture and identity is centered around the *Fa'a Samoa*, "the Samoan way", a concept that covers the Samoan life-world which is perceived as a web of interrelated belongings. Each Samoan belongs to a family and to one or more *aiga*<sup>1</sup>, that is, an extended family, and to a specific piece of land.

Central to Samoan culture and political system is the *aiga*, led by the *matai*, an official representative or head of the family that is chosen by consensus by the *aiga*. The members of the *aiga*, on the one hand, must serve the *matai*, but on the other hand, the *matai* must look to the best of the *aiga*, because in the end, the *aiga* has *pule*, which could be translated as authority, over the *matai* title and can, theoretically, dismiss him (Ye 2010: 836, Tcherkézoff 2008: 257). When the *matai* dies or by some other reason should surrender his title, the title does not pass on to his bodily heir but rather to a chosen successor of the title, even if this is often the same person. The constitutional and political system and also the land tenure system and the distribution of resources such as money, land and agricultural products are based on the organizational principles of the *aiga* and the *matai*, that is, on the kinship system called the *fa'amatai*.

By having access to family land, Samoans have a lifetime security concerning food and housing. The procedures connected to land rights are albeit somewhat complicated. The owners of the land is the *aiga*, but the *pule* over the land, that is, the authority over the land, is vested in the *matai*, who could be said to be the "administrator and trustee of [the family] heritage" (Ye 2010: 836).

Any member of the family has the right to use family lands, but this right is only realized if the family member fulfils his duty to render services to the *matai* and if he lives on the family land. The rights concerning occupation and use of family lands somewhat differs between different family members, depending on par

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<sup>1</sup> [ainga]

example how much service one has rendered to the *matai*. The interests that the members of the *aiga* have in these concerns are called *tautua* interests.

While previous laws concerning the registration of land have proposed to register *pule* over land and *tautua* interests, the LTRA concerns the registration of *title* over land in accordance with the Torrens system<sup>2</sup> (Ye 2010: 845). The term *title* intended here is *title* as in the legal term for rights in a piece of property in which a party may own either a legal interest or an equitable interest; it also refers to a document serving as evidence of ownership. The shift to registering *title* over land however comes with some problems. Ye (2010: 845) means that “The use of common law terms here changes the customary land concepts [...]”. Ye recognizes some main problems concerning the registration of adjudicated customary land<sup>3</sup> in accordance with the LTRA and its interpretation; whether the registration concerns customary land, and if so; if registered customary land remains customary land or if it is transformed into freehold land, and moreover, under whose name the land shall be registered; under the *matai*’s name, under the *aiga*’s name as multiple ownership, that is, joint tenancy, or under the name of a corporation formed by the *aiga* (Ye 2010: 846ff).

If the LTRA is interpreted as being applicable to adjudicated customary land, there is a risk that registered customary land will be converted into freehold land, since it will be registered in the same register as freehold land with no legal clause saying it is something different than freehold land. Also, the LTRA “does not specify whether adjudicated customary land should be registered as customary land or freehold land” (Ye 2010: 848). Shortly, it is open to interpretation whether customary land can be registered as freehold land, thus being available for purchase and trade, its inalienable status being abated (Ye 2010: 848ff)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the Torrens system see Ye 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Adjudicated customary land is land in respect of which judgment has been made by the Land and Titles Court of Samoa.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Ye 2010.

Concerning under whose name the land should be registered, registering the land under the *aiga*'s name as multiple ownership or as corporation ownership would be a problem, since everyone in the *aiga* is a *potential* owner of the family land with the result that the owners are in constant change, and therefore a set ownership potentially could exclude certain members or be used to exclude certain members of the *aiga*, par example owners that on the moment of registration are not residing at the family land. (Ye 2010: 850). Even disregarding or coming around those problems, there is, according to Ye, a fear among some that with the members of the *aiga* being guaranteed the tenure of their land, the incentive to serve the *matai* disappears and the social system of the *fa'amatai* will perish, undermining the foundation of the Samoan society and culture (Ye 2010: 850).

According to Ye, what is most likely to happen is that the land will be registered under the *matai*'s name (Ye 2010: 850). In this case, the members of the *aiga* could register as beneficiary owners as part of a trust instrument, the *matai* being the trustee (Ye 2010: 851). A trust instrument is a relationship in which a person holds other individuals' property and is subjected to certain duties to use and protect the property for the benefit of others (The free dictionary 2015). The compounds of a trust instrument are related as follows: the person or persons who are benefited by the trust are the beneficiaries, the property that comprises the trust is the trust property, and the person who holds the property for the other person's or persons' benefit is the trustee, who must act in good faith to protect and serve the interests of the beneficiaries (The free dictionary 2015, Ye 2010: 851).

Registering a trust, however, is not compulsory under the LTRA, and therefore, the risk for members of the *aiga* to lose the rights to their land is increased (Ye 2010: 854). Even if a trust is registered, there is a problem in that "[...] neither the *matai's pule* over land nor the *aiga's tautua* interest equates to ownership as understood by western property concepts" (Ye 2010: 851). The interests that beneficiary owners have as part in a trust doesn't fully reflect *tautua* interests, and the *matai*'s obligations doesn't fully reflect the obligations of a trustee, as the concept is understood by Westerners. For example, again, the members of

the *aiga* with rightful claims to the land are in constant change, members occupy different plots and have different rights, and complicating it further, the rights are changeable, considering different circumstances. In other words, neither the beneficiaries of the trust nor the trust property are consistent, and therefore the complex process of land tenure under the *fa'amatai* system could hardly be reflected by noting a set trust instrument in the registration (Ye 2010: 851).

Moreover, the LTRA opens up a possibility for selling customary land to bonafide buyers, but also to dishonest buyers, since the act specifies that purchase of land with the buyer having knowledge of the existence of a registered trust that might not agree or might not know of the purchase, is not necessarily fraud (as would be the case with the buyer having knowledge of the existence of unregistered interest), thus declaring such a purchase indefeasible (Ye 2010: 853f). If this happens, the *aiga* has no right to government compensation in accordance with that same act (Ye 2010: 853f). The same goes for land further sold to a bonafide purchaser, even if the seller has been declared proprietor through fraud. The *aiga* thus cannot protect its land rights (Ye 2010: 853f).

Based on studies on areas where the Torrens registration system, Ye (2010: 842) points out that “[...] it seems that the introduction of Torrens has one of two effects: either customary lands are privatized, or the locals resist registration of customary land which results in only lands held by foreigners being registered.”

### 3.2. The *fa'amatai* system

The *fa'amatai* is a system of belonging and no Samoan is left out of this system (Tcherkézoff 2008: 255f). Central to the *fa'amatai* system are *the aiga*, *the matai title and the land*, which are all compounds in the Samoan *village*. The center of the *aiga* numbers up to 30-40 people (Tcherkézoff 2008: 251) but in the next step in the extended family it can mount up to 400 people (Tcherkézoff 2008: 251, Christian pers. comm. 2010). A member of an *aiga* is anyone who can state a genealogical link to the *aiga's matai* (Tcherkézoff 2008: 257). Being a member of

an *aiga* means that one can participate in decisions concerning the *aiga*. These decisions concern all type of matters, from big decisions concerning the plantations and such as whom to send abroad for studies or work to everyday life decisions. As a member of the *aiga*, one could also possibly be a candidate for the *matai* title if a new *matai* is to be chosen (Tcherkézoff 2008: 257). Decisions in the *aiga* are made by consensus, and family meetings can therefore go on for days (Tcherkézoff 2008: 258). Although a person with a higher rank's words may carry more weight – that is, only in the way that his speech will sound more persuasive – the discussion continues until *everyone* has agreed (Tcherkézoff 2008: 258).

The title or name bestowed upon the *matai* descends from a semi-divine ancestor from time immemorial, and the *matai*, by bearing the name not only holds a title, but he *is* that ancestor (Tcherkézoff 2008: 262). Tcherkézoff means that the *matai* has “just relived a condensed version of this [his] ancestor's history” (Tcherkézoff 2008: 262). This means, when decisions are made in the *aiga*, through the *matai*, the *aiga*'s ancestors are present. In Samoa, everyone is linked to one or more *matai* names (Tcherkézoff 2008: 256). The *fa'amatai* is thus at the same time a hierarchy that can be observed daily in the village and an ideology of belonging to a system which for everyone defines 'Samoa'. To be 'Samoa' is always to be able, through the agency of the *matai* name one carries or to which one is linked, to establish a status orientation ('respect' — *fa'aaloalo*) in relation to anyone one encounters anywhere in the country. (Tcherkézoff 2008: 262)

Since not complying with the *fa'amatai* system can lead to banishment, a very harsh punishment in such a collective culture as the Samoan, almost everyone acts in accordance with the *fa'amatai* (Tcherkézoff 2008: 264).

Also linked to the *matai* name is the specific piece of land belonging to the *aiga*, or to which the *aiga* belongs (Tcherkézoff 2008: 280f). People are being perceived as *belonging to the land* rather than the other way around. This, for a western mindset, different way of thinking about owning, even takes expression in the Samoan language. In the Samoan language, one uses different possessive pronouns for things that are privately owned, like a TV or a car, and for things where the owner isn't perceived as the “cause” of the ownership, as is the case

with a piece of land or with a *matai* title, or with one's own head (Tcherkézoff 2008: 280f). Concerning land, Tcherkézoff (2008: 276) writes: "An initial comparison with our mode of perception immediately pinpoints the matter of land: for us in the West, it is a commodity, but for Samoans, it is a *matai* name; it is alienable for us (it can be bought and sold), it is inalienable for them."

This fundamental difference in perception between Samoan and Western way of thinking regarding ownership and land has the potential to cause "misunderstandings". Between 1850 and 1900, Samoans sold three times the total land area of the country to the Europeans, still with the result that only 8 % of the land claimed purchased was actually approved (Crocombe 1987:111).

The introduction of Samoa into a cash-based world economy has produced the habit of sending members of the *aiga* abroad (also a convenient way to get rid of criminal and political opponents to the system), the Samoans in Samoa getting used to a high material standard and the home economy thus becoming dependent on the cash inflow from remittances (Tisdell 2000). The cash inflow has however dropped, partly due to the fact that some Samoans living and working abroad, with children born abroad, no longer want to participate in the Samoan culture (Tcherkézoff 2008: 284). To make up for the loss of cash, the Samoan government has expressed an opinion that Parliament should look over the inalienable status of land and consider making land available for investors to purchase. Tcherkézoff (2008: 284). Tcherkézoff (2008: 284) means that

It is clear that, if these [customary] lands were ever to come under private ownership, the whole *faamatai* would collapse. Samoans do everything required by the *faamatai* because — they say in many ways — this participation is what builds and maintains their *feeling of being 'at home'* [min kursivering] when they are in their house and on their land. The same sentiment is expressed in its negative version: 'If I no longer take part in the exchanges, in the name of what could I stay on this land?' In a system where there is no private property, permanence is manifested by belonging: by giving, one constantly reaffirms: 'I belong to this name, therefore to this land!' No one is saying here that life in a society still firmly governed by the *faamatai* is better or worse than in a society governed by private ownership. What is important is that the status of the land is *the basis of everything* [emphasis added]. That is the boundary between change and fundamental transformation.

The village is composed of three elements: the *aigas*, the *matai* titles and the land (2008: 259). While decisions traditionally are made in the villages, Samoa has since about 1890 also a government, but villages still holds a very strong position in Samoa, emotionally but also officially, for example, authority over village law and order, health and social issues is vested in the villages (compare Tcherkézoff 2008: 247)

Not complying with the *matai* system can, according to Tcherkézoff (2008: 264), lead to banishment from the village and the group. Even though the banished person can immediately find other relatives to stay with, the punishment is very hard since it puts great shame on the banished person and on his or her family. Therefore, Tcherkézoff (2008: 264) writes, it is “almost impossible to find someone who acts with total disregard for the constraints of the *faamatai*”.

### 3.3. Psychological affects to land in Samoa

In a collection of essays entitled Samoan Frangrances, the former Samoan head of state Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi gives several examples of the traditional Samoan relation to land, examples which illuminate the psychological affects underlying this relation. The Samoan language itself betrays things about the Samoan psychological relationship to land through interesting homonyms concerning words connected to land. *Fanua*, land, also means placenta (Pratt referred to in Efi 2009: 279), *fatu*, rock, also means heart and *eleele*, land, or *palapala*, mud, both also mean blood (Efi 2009: 279). He cites Aumua Clark Peteru, who writes about this that “(t)he earth or land equates with human life” (Efi 2009: 279). In Samoa, the land is psychologically forcefully linked to the family, both the living relatives, especially the *matais* of the family, and the deceased ones, the ancestors. This is metaphorically expressed also in concrete and physical terms in the fact that deceased family members are buried on the family land (Tcherkézoff 2008: 258). This is significant also because Samoans maintain a vivid relationship with their deceased family members and with their ancestors. The chiefs are involved in a continuing dialogue with ancestors

through dreams, that are sometimes combined with fast and meditation to put oneself in the spiritual mood to receive *moe manatunatu*, “the wisdom of the dead” (Efi 2009: 96, Peteru in Efi 2009: 283). It is also important to note that we know from other writers that these deceased ancestors buried on family land confer certain rights onto the living: “Even if the land holds a founding house — and in this event nothing and no one can annul it, it is an ancestral site and the ancestor is believed to be buried there — the village can expel the people who occupy it.” (Tcherkézoff 2008: 258). Peteru states about the right to the ancestral burial and the right of the living to this land that “Nothing less than one’s identity, rooted in spiritual and cultural ties to the land, is at stake” (Atua 2009: 281). Tradition holds that when building a *fale* (*fale* is the Samoan word for house) the placenta of the builder was buried below the main post of the *fale*, and the *fale* could also serve as the repository for the remains of one’s ancestors (Efi 2009: 279). The construction takes the shape of a symbolic procreation, with ceremonies celebrating the placements of the main posts, representing phallic elements, into the earth, as well as the placement of the last part of the roof, representing climax (Efi 2009: 279) (which might be compared with the body-house-cosmos in Eliade 1961: 175). The relationship between the two power positions in the Samoan society, *alii* and *tulafale* chiefs, are also expressed symbolically through the language describing the *fale*. The word for the stone foundation of *fales* for both types of chiefs is *tulaga fale*, from which the word *tulafale* is derived (Efi 2009: 280). The mystical power of the *alii* derives from the connection with the earth and the executive authority of the *tulafale* stands, like a rock foundation, between that and the mortal desires of man, that are represented by the house posts (Efi 2009: 280). The source of authority and legitimacy is linked to the land (Efi 2009: 282). Peteru, cited by Tui Atua in his book, argues that residency is fundamental for political power, in the sense that a chief not resident in the area he is supposed to have authority over by ways of his *matai* title is hard to claim legitimate. This is because the political authority is linked to the land and dependent upon the *matai* being present and visible upon the land, and that this is so because when the title holder is not present, he cannot inspire love and emotions and the natural consequences of these emotions, respect and loyalty, from the people that he’s supposed to govern, thus



his authority fails (Efi 2009: 282).

Even God is drawn into this localised system of relational belonging that ultimately depends upon land. Efi criticizes the barrier or *krisis* instigated by Paulus, that puts a ban on relating to God, who is “the wholly other”, in Western Christianity, and means that in the Samoan Christianity, God is not some distant, faceless being but a relative, a loving father, an extension of the extended family (Efi 2009). Tuagalu states that in the Samoan indigenous religion, man and the cosmos as well as all the living beings in it share the same genealogy and that they are tied together by a system of relationships of mutual gifts and feelings (Tuagalu in Efi 2009: 291, that includes asking, sharing, sacrificing and celebrating, much like the general workings of the *fa’amatai*. These relationships include *tapus*, sacred restrictions or sanctions, as in the case of the mackerel tradition of the village of Asau, where the head fisherman invites the fish to the shore and the fish sacrifices themselves in acknowledgement of the fisherman’s own sacrifice through ascetic deprivation, and the fisherman does not take anymore than what is needed to feed the village (Efi 2009: 279). Another case is in the case of cutting down trees, which requires *faalanu*, asking pardon, for taking its life and causing it pain – the term for cutting down a tree, *oia*, means “to cry out in pain” (Efi 2009: 279). Lupe writes that “the Samoan self is a relational self, whether engaged in relating with other people, nature, and the cosmos or introspectively with oneself.” (Lupe 2009: 257). Myth also plays a vital role in the *Fa’a Samoa*. *Fagogo*, fables and fairy tales, and *mama*, masticated food, provided from the grandparents to the grandchildren, was in the traditional Samoan society a way of creating a strong bond between generations and transfer knowledge, cultural, psychological and social (Efi 2009). Lupe, a psychotherapist, acknowledges the importance of the fagogos as instruments of transmitting knowledge, in writing that the “telling of these stories from one generation to the next provided guidance from the deepest level of the collective psyche, the archetypal realm” (Lupe 2009: 258).

## 4. Method and material

### 4.1.1. The methodological framework: positioning the researcher in theory and practise

We stubbornly claim that it is pragmatically fruitful to assume the existence of a reality beyond the researcher's egocentricity and the ethnocentricity of the research community (paradigms, consciousness, text, rhetorical manoeuvring), and that we as researchers should be able to say something insightful about this reality. (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 3).

At the center of our study is the ethnographic data we assembled during a minor field study conducted in Samoa from mid-September to mid-November 2010. The minor field study was financed partly by SIDA through a Minor Field Study scholarship and partly by our own investment. It has been supervised by Professor Thomas Malm at the Human Ecology Division at the University of Lund, and precious help has been given by our supervisor in field, professor Unasa Vaa at the Center for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa, whom we contacted a few months before traveling to Samoa.

Ethnography is a qualitative, anthropologically oriented method aiming to describe a people, a group or a culture through writing, sometimes defined simply as "the art and science of describing a group or culture" (Fetterman referred to in Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 84). Ethnography as a method underlines the mutual dependency of theory and data (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 85). Our research questions and lines of thought in this study goes along the line of those posed by psychological anthropology, and as for research methodology we draw our inspiration from a method stemming from psychological anthropology, person-centered ethnography.

Person-centered ethnography is concerned with how people understand, experience and relate to their larger socio-cultural context, and paired with a human ecological perspective, thus looking for how people relate to, experience and understand their larger human-environmental context, this is a suitable approach to our subject. This approach places focus on the terms in which interviewers formulate their questions, general – "Tell me about the place in

society of old people in Samoa” or personalised – “Are you close to your old relatives and how often do you see them?”, gaining impersonal accounts of cultural praxis – such as, “In Samoa we honour our old people by means of this and this” – or personal narratives of experience – such as, “I take care of my *matua tausi*, grandfather and grandmother, every day because they are old, I love them very much and this is what I do in life at this moment” – and refers to this difference as the distinction between viewing interviewees as *informants* or as *respondents*. Both types of questions are useful. The latter type asks more directly about feelings and experiences and is consequentially considered to require a much longer acquaintance with the interviewee (Levy & Hollan, 1998). The ethnographic method was combined with a phenomenological approach, our data collecting and attention being focused on expressions of psychological affects to land. Phenomenology is an approach that orders observations on specific phenomena and relate them to each other in a way consistent with fundamental theory, but not derived directly from theory (Hilborn & Mangel 1997).

In interpreting the expressions of psychological affects the method of narrative inquiry has been used. Narrative inquiry aims at the “why” behind human action and tries to understand phenomena through the meaning people attribute to them when accounting narratives (Lyons & Kubler LaBoskey, 2002: 163). A narrative might be considered as a non-neutral and emotionally infused rhetorical account aiming at and fuelled by the desire to communicate meaning (Bruner 1990: 85).

To collect ethnographic data both participant observation and interviews were used. To answer our research questions and analyse our hypothesis, we started narrowing our research questions down into a couple of more specific questions that were more easily researchable through interviews and that would help us to focus our attention in the participant observation. These were as follows:

1. *Is Hypothesis 1 correct?* Does the Samoans perceive the land as animated? How is it perceived that the land and the ancestors share the same name?

To answer this, we crafted an extensive formulary of interview questions concerning perceptions of land, perceptions of the ancestors, feelings connected to the land and feelings connected to the ancestors, and planned to conduct deep interviews with a small number of Samoans of different age, gender and social position. In addition, we engaged in a participant observation focusing on observing not only people and their behaviour and spontaneous comments regarding land and ancestors but also cultural expressions such as art, handicraft objects, dance, music, fashion, architecture, film, tv, commercials, design, interior design, clothes, jewellery and decoration such as tattoos, to collect data based on which an interpretation of a cultural relationship primarily to land could be enacted. We also planned to, if time and possibilities allowed it, acquire Samoan fact and fiction literature that treated these subjects to analyse.

2. *Is Hypothesis 2 correct?* Does the LTRA alter the power balance in the *aiga*? What are the elements of the change that the LTRA introduces? How is LTRA motivated by its proponents and why is it feared by its opponents? To answer this, we crafted a formulary of interview questions about LTRA and planned to conduct deep interviews with leading opponents and proponents of the law, preferably people with an institutional lawyer background or who were comparably skilled in Samoan law system and legal culture and in addition with people who were politically orientated such as journalists, politicians and activists. In addition, we added questions to the interview formulary regarding relationship to land and ancestors about informants feelings, fears or hopes towards the LTRA. We also planned to do a background literary study as well as studying domestic and oversea's Samoan newspaper and blog coverage of the LTRA if possible.

The interviews that we eventually conducted during the study were of two kinds: semi-structured interviews based on the interview questionnaires we crafted, formally agreed upon and planned as well as recorded on sound and almost always on camera, and informal, unstructured interviews that took place during normal, casual conversations in different everyday situations during our stay in

Samoa. For the semi-structured interviews, as our research proceeded and new findings spurred new questions, we ended up revising our original interview plan, using more rarely the 5 page formulary of questions regarding perceptions of and feelings connected to land and ancestors and the 3 page formulary of questions regarding LTRA and instead more frequently 1-2 page questionnaires of for the specific informant specially drafted questions on various aspects of Samoan culture, social system and identity, which we felt produced better, more informative and associative results. In regards to all the three types of pre-established interview questionnaires, numerous other questions were asked and many of the pre-written ones omitted during the interviews, as we believed more interesting and perhaps unexpected results would come from creating a relaxed interview situation where interviewer and informant could go with the flow, mimicking a normal conversation and allowing the conversation to drift. Also, certain parts of the questions regarding perceptions of and feelings towards land and ancestors were regularly omitted since they became obsolete because of a falsifying of research hypothesis – or rather, our Hypothesis 1 quite immediately, during the first interviews, seemed to become falsified (see chapter 5, “Results” for a further discussion of this). The original interview questionnaires are attached to this thesis as Appendix A.

Even though our interview method is distinctively qualitative, we have included a list of brief “statistical” descriptions of each informant (in 4.2., “Material”) since we agree with the view that regardless of the problematic nature of social statistics such listings still might have a certain value as background material in qualitative research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 8), especially as a quick organizing overview over which social structures the informants and thereby possibly, the research, is part of.

The unstructured interviews took place in informal settings such as cafés, bars, clubs, restaurants, taxis, hotels, on the beach and on other outdoor hangout spots outside Apia, and on the soccer field during soccer practise and soccer games. They took the form of casual chats, conversations and discussions on all kinds of subjects.

Our participant observation was focused on detecting feelings, affects and behaviour regarding land, although we also aspired to gain a general understanding of the Samoan culture and social system that would help us structure our observations of psychological affects and place them inside a system. We spent seven weeks in the capital city of Apia, the largest city in Samoa with around 35 000 inhabitants, on the north coast of the island Upolu, and one week in Manase, a small village on the North coast of the larger but scarcely populated island of Savaii. A couple of days we also spent driving around Upolu and Savaii.

Almost immediately upon our arrival in Apia, we met a group of young people aged 15-25 who were involved in one of the 63 soccer clubs in Samoa. They invited us two to join the female team, as were to be shown not because of merit but because of the team being plagued by a scarce number of players and frequent dropouts and walkovers to the rival team, and with a tough season coming up. Our male travel companion was invited to join the male team. The male and the female teams trained together every day and had games twice a week. None of us had ever played soccer on a competition level before, but we managed to run for the ball and learn a lot about team spirit in Samoa. Through the soccer team we got to know most of the young people in Apia, since every family had at least one member playing soccer in one of the teams of the capital, so if they didn't play in our team, we played against them. Naturally, young people became the focus of our participant observation of the Samoan system and of Samoan ways of expressing feelings and affects. The special and, from what we could deduct, almost international, ways of interaction in team sport and on the soccer field provided an interesting element from a methodological point of view, which we felt definitely enriched and deepened our participation in the lives and culture of these young people, as well as enabled us and our friends to share emotions, irritations and goals – on the soccer field, a goal is a goal, a mistake is a mistake, and the famous Samoan courtesy and almost ritualistic friendliness give way to hasty, annoyed comments to a “whitey” who missed a pass, and the white, Northern European researcher forgets her not-so-relativistic, coolminded distance and von-oben-perspective and screams savagely when a goal is made.

Competing together and maybe especially, as was mostly the case with our team, losing together, creates a bond between people that serves as an emotional icebreaker that provides an entrance to and endless material for casual conversation as well as opens up for deeper conversation on personal subjects such as feelings, expectations, hopes and fears. It also, to some extent, seems to equalize the social status of people, creating a more relaxed discussion environment and making it possible to talk more freely and less dogmatically about things that lingers in the background when visiting a third world country as a first world student and researcher, such as economical inequalities, cultural differences and prejudices, “their” view of “us” and “our” view of “them”. We felt this as a notable difference when comparing our interviews and discussions with our teammates with those we did with other informants with whom we did not have the shared experience of the games and practises. Even though there also might have been other differences that contributed to this feeling, we believe that this team experience is responsible for or strongly encouraged a lot of our findings and conclusions.

Playing soccer also provided us with an “entrance ticket” into everyday life, and other people with a motive and an easy way to initiate contact with us, since rumours spread about the fact that one of Apia’s soccer teams had white players and people whom we didn’t know knew of us initiated discussions about the latest game when we went to the supermarket or the bar, and sometimes helped us when we looked for institutional interviews since they had a family member in our team and had heard about us. We followed our teammates to clubs and hangout spots in which we were the only white people and where people would ask us in a surprised tone how we found the place, and thus had the chance to have a look on things that we felt many other white people in Samoa never knew of. In that way we found two clubs hosted in old industrial buildings in the countryside outside Apia, “underground”, alternative clubs with music and performances, clubs of a type that can be found in any European big city, with Samoan house music and disco-dancing inspired by the traditional dances of siva, miles away from the expensive and nicely trimmed shows of the siva and Samoan music organized both by large hotels and various “authentic” cultural centers in the capital city.

Those sides of our stay in Samoa were in flagrant contrast with the behaviour of another group of young people we got to know, people who worked in Samoa for the U.N., the U.S. Peace Corps and other international organizations, and who frequented two or three specific bars with mainly white clientele and lived in gated communities without hardly any contact with their fellow Samoans of the same age, all the more noteworthy since the two groups of people shared the same favorite pastimes – to hang out on the beach or in a bar drinking and chatting.

We repeatedly frequented several different places in Apia that had their specific circle of people and where we met and interacted with different groups of people, these places serving as casual and recurring bases of our interaction with the culture and everyday life of the Samoan capital. Besides the soccer training field, one such place was a restaurant, where U.N. and other foreign people often went to lunch and where many of the staff and customers were *fa'afafines*, the Samoan name for LGBTQ-persons, and through them we met and interviewed a couple of *fa'afafines* and gained some insight into their cultural role and status in Samoa. Another place was a café owned by a half-chinese *matai*-family, where we met one of our primary informants who invited us to her family for dinner, and both young people and middle aged women were frequent customers who introduced us to the workings of business women in Samoa. At our hotel in Apia we got to know the owners and the chef, whom all spent several years outside Samoa and came back to set up a business.

During our stay in Samoa two national festivities occurred, the first of which is a religious festivity mainly celebrated by the children who dress up in white and perform in the churches, White Sunday, which we spent together with our team friends eating a large picknick *tona'i*, a traditional Samoan Sunday lunch, and the *Palolo Rise*, a couple of days during which the *palolo*, sea slug, breeds and their eggs rise to sea level to be collected and eaten as a culinary delicacy.

We have tried to balance the findings of the interviews and of the participant observations with a literary study, so called triangulation, which is considered a method of diminishing the effects of various bias and arrive at more balanced



results and better define a particular phenomenon (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009: 86). A literature study therefore accompanied the ethnographic field study and was necessary for three reasons. First, to comprehend the complicated system of land regulation in Samoa as well as the essence of the change in that same land regulation that was introduced by the LTRA, the Land and Titles Registration Act 2008. Second, to form a background opinion of and add additional information to our experience of Samoan culture and the Samoan psychological relationship to land. Third, to enrich our understanding of the concept of alienation, of the human ecological triangular model of human-environmental relations, and of the concepts of systems theory and cybernetics which we used in our analysis in this thesis.

Thus, we have ploughed through literature from various academic disciplines to trace the different expressions of the concept of alienation and theories on its effects on the individual, society and on nature. Starting from our perception of the problem of alienation as a fundamental one in human existence and from our understanding of human-environmental relations as a triangular system functioning according to the principles of systems theory and cybernetics, we have used our observations and ethnographical data to outline the basic traits of a theory of the relationship between alienation and environment and culture. A correct description of our methodology in writing this thesis would be to say that we have used abduction, a method focused on the “discovery of patterns that bring understanding” combining literature studies and empirical data, alternating between theory and empirical facts that are both “successively reinterpreted in the light of each other” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 4). The method consists in testing a hypothetical overarching theoretical pattern on a single case, which if the explanation of the case that results is convincing strengthens the hypothetical theory, that further on should be tested on more cases (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009: 4). During the whole process, the hypothetical pattern of theory is repeatedly refined and revised, giving the method of abduction a similarity to hermeneutics (Eco referred to in Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 4) and to the theories about interpretation of a research question as well as theory formulation as following the pattern of the hermeneutical spiral. Hermeneutics is the study and practice of interpretation, and the spiral

represents the mental movement of the researcher who circles around the same problem or question, gaining a higher understanding for each circle of reinterpretation (Schokel & Bravo 1998: 74). The findings and experiences we encountered during our study as well as the research questions, the hypothesis and theories we have used or formulated have all been interpreted and revisited in the spirit of the hermeneutical spiral. We have also been inspired by the concept of reflexivity, in which the researcher strives to attain an awareness of the cultural differences between himself and the people he researches through tracking and describing the effect of such differences on himself, since he – and the creative images he creates via interpretation – are a part of the processes that he aims to describe and through his description contribute to directing these processes in one direction or another (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 8ff). The awareness of this complex relation between the process of generating knowledge and the various contexts of that process can take different forms and create different imprints on that process, but the concept of reflexivity might be said to above all underline the importance to train the ability to break away from a frame of reference and look at what it is not capable of saying (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 200: 270).

We had planned to exercise a discourse analysis surrounding the debate over LTRA in Samoan blogs and press, but this was not possible since our study was conducted in 2010, two years after the passing of the LTRA, and the discussion of the act, contrary to what we believed reading about it before our trip, had died out and was not talked upon much any longer, and because even though the National Library of Samoa keeps old newspapers, difficulties existed in regards to accessing the archives.

#### **4.1.2. Reflections on the researcher role: possible sources of errors and misinterpretations, and counter-strategies**

It is an expression of great poverty when people need lots of possessions, because it proves that they lack the things that are of the Great Spirit.

- Samoan high chief Tuiavii – as interpreted by German Erich Scheurmann (1988: 62; our translation)

First of all, the ethnographic method ideally requires that the researcher spend a lot more time in field than what was the case in our study – a year's submission is often referred to as norm, though briefer periods in field are also currently sometimes denoted as ethnography (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2009: 85). 8 weeks is still a very short period for an ethnographic field study, and person-centered ethnography explicitly stresses the longer time frame compared to normal ethnography, which is needed to get well-enough acquainted with the interviewees to be able to ask personal questions (Levy & Hollan 1998).

To mitigate this source of error as far as possible, we made a conscious choice as to almost always choose as interviewees the people we got to know the best and hang out with during our stay, feeling that knowing the person allowed us to make more specific questions while at the same time respecting the person's integrity, as well as as far as possible minimizing cultural biases both on our part and on the part of the interviewee. It also allowed us to compare the answers from the semi-structured interview with the person's general behaviour, informal statements and things claimed in informal interviews, and with his or her actions, thus gaining a deeper understanding of the person and the culture. It also allowed us to, in the lines of reflexive methodology, turn the focus around and study cultural differences partly appearing in the guise of what effect the person had on us.

It is important for the researcher to realize that he as well as the people he study carry preconceptions and sometimes prejudices about themselves, the world and the other, preconceptions stemming from the personal cultural and ideological background and that affect both behaviour, language and models of thought. As white, Northern European women descending from the academical social class, we take certain things for granted, and so do the Samoans. Such *cultural bias* are always present in a research situation. Interviews are known to be affected by the so called *interviewer effect*. This is when the interviewee response is affected by the presence of the researcher due to either his or her race, ethnicity, colour,

or response to certain answers. We have noted this effect in a couple of our interviews, where the fact that we were Palagi<sup>5</sup> – the Samoan word for “white people” or “oversees people” – and thus arriving from the perceived rich and powerful West, as well as being women, seem to have had some effect on the informants’ answers to our questions.

Since we have filmed most of our interviews it might also be fitting to mention what in the documentary film community is sometimes referred to as the *camera effect*. This effect occurs when people feel as if they talk directly to the camera, an inanimated being, and does not psychologically realize that they actually are talking to an audience that might be worldwide, and may therefore not be aware of the consequences of their casual, everyday statements. This is strengthened by the fact that the camera makes many people feel important, building up to a “confession situation” where they sometimes reveal more of their personal information than they might afterwards feel comfortable with (Åhlander, pers. comm, 2011). The camera might also produce the opposite effect, nervousness and an invading sense of seriousness and formality, a “this is for real, I need to make a good impression” feeling, rendering people more conventional, rigid and impersonal, and downplaying or mitigating their opinions to a socially-approved formula. This was especially true in many situations where we noted answers changing in comparison to what we’ve heard informants express in informal conversations, in many cases becoming more polished and less emphatic or politically opinionated, leading us to draw the conclusion that the formal situation of the semi-structured interview in general had a mitigating effect on the informant, who seemed to try to present him- or herself in the most socially pleasurable light possible, downplaying critical opinions and socially adverse emotions. Though, a few notable exceptions did also materialize, where the formal on-camera situation of the semi-structured interview seemed to serve as an activant to the unleashing of stronger and more polarised emotions, opinions and reactions, concurrent with what one might expect from the “confession situation”. In these cases, the researcher or the filmmaker has to dedicate serious consideration around the ethical dilemma of what to include in his final result

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<sup>5</sup> Palagi is short for papalagi [papalangi]

since the interviewee might not afterwards feel comfortable with displaying such emotions and opinions.

Samoans are known for posing problems to researchers because of the focus of the Samoan culture on the interest of the collective before individual interest, in research situation taking the shape of *courtesy bias*, meaning that people will give you the answers they think that you want to hear, and *social-approval bias*, meaning that people will give you answers that comply with accepted social norms (Howard 1986:176). This was, during our study, in certain situations blatant. Initial questions would almost always produce an identical, impersonal account describing Samoa with certain recurring phrases and adjectives. Specifically, questions regarding *aitus*, ghosts, were unanimously responded to with a simple denial of the faith in or existence of ghosts – though, in books and when interviewing Westerners resident in Samoa, it was stated that such a faith was widespread and almost general (see for example Peteru in Efi 2009: 283). It was also obvious in the phenomena that Samoans don't generally use the word "no" when invited to or asked to participate in something – this is considered impolite. Instead, they might say yes and thereafter create diverse polite and recurring excuses, simply not show up or apply other avoidance tactics. It is also important to reflect upon how these cultural differences of communication effect the Samoans' view of us, possibly making us seem rude, unsophisticated and too direct. We tried to be sensitive to what seemed to be appropriate and to use the same tactics that our friends did, when having to decline something, since we presumed that this would be culturally accepted and considered less rude than a direct "no". We also tried to adapt our Western more direct mode of communication to the more metaphorical and allusive Polynesian mode, in order to avoid being seen as quadratic and unsophisticated. Maybe this was helped by one of us having lived many years in Italy, which in comparison to Sweden entertains a much less direct and more allusive style of communication.

To get around courtesy bias, to the extent this is possible, we find it crucial to be receptive and aware of the fact that not every invitation or acceptance is what it seems to be, and to try and learn when tones and facial expressions reveal that

something is courtesy and not a real intention. Following the tip of our supervisor Malm we sought to ask open questions without possible yes-or-no answers, trying to avoid making it obvious which kind of answer we would prefer – asking “Which road leads to the beach?” rather than “Is this the road to the beach?”. We learned to avoid all questions posed as “Is it true that...” or “Is it like this in Samoa...”, and to formulate our questions in other terms to minimise the role of courtesy bias.

As for social-approval bias, person-centered ethnography is especially useful as a methodology to get sight of and hopefully circumscribe this type of bias, since personal, experience-based narratives in our study seemed to produce different results in regards to “the official”, culturally approved version of Samoan culture that one received whenever asking in general terms. Since the informants were generally people that we hung out with and became friends with, we could also compare the results from the semi-structured interviews and the informal interviews we made.

Our impression is that the Samoan courtesy bias and social approval bias had a significantly stronger effect on the semi-structured interviews, that were conducted in a more formal setting, than in the unstructured interviews, making the data received in the semi-structured interviews less reliable.

During our study we also caught sight of one of our own biases, as well as the ones entertained by other Westerners in Samoas. One particular bias common to Western researchers in the Pacific is the one of the *noble savage*, a follower and development of the older and specifically colonial bias the *barbarian*, still adhered to by certain U.N. representatives in Samoa, as our experience in Samoa has showed us. Both the two savage bias have their roots in the Western dualistic conception of The Other, and identifies the non-Western individual as closely linked to “the wild” and as a “natural” being, as opposed to the Western, who is either civilised or corrupted by culture (see Ellingson 2001 and Hoxie 2003). In the original version of the bias, the barbarian savage, the non-Western individual is seen as a passionate, tendentially good-natured, but sometimes

ferocious, violent and cruel, being incapable of controlling his emotions, be they positive or negative, and who needs guidance and dominance from Western people to achieve a higher level of culture, or, in modern terms, development. In the developed version of the bias, the noble savage, the non-Western individual is seen as a wise and almost mythical being who by means of his culture are closer to the spiritual sides of life and who understands the workings of life, nature and cosmos and in whose wise insight the Western individual breathlessly can seek council.

Obviously, we cannot know to what extent the interview responses and the observations we made are thwarted by bias, but we hope that awareness of certain typical bias and taking measures to limit them, as well as using triangulation will have some effect in counter-balancing them.

Language could also be seen as an important barrier in which misinterpretations might originate, since all languages are embedded in culture and in some part are based on cultural metaphors that are not possible to translate accurately into another language, and since subtleties of expressions are lost as most cultural concepts mostly cannot be expressed adequately in a foreign language. Still, it is possible to communicate, lest one is aware of the possibilities of misinterpretation and take this into account. We don't speak Samoan, but many Samoans speak very good English. English is not our first language. We do not have the same understanding as a Samoan of Samoan body language and tone of voice, which according to some estimates amounts to 90 % of conversation (Mehrabian 1981). Besides language itself, different cultural styles of communication and of presenting yourself can provoke misinterpretation and also irritation.

As important as keeping in mind the differences in preconceptions between researcher and informants, it is also important to take into account the differences between different informants, whose perspectives may differ and whose statements may be more or less credible because of social status, class and position. Since we apply qualitative interviews on psychological affects

which we interpret, societal position, civil status, age, occupation and other factors may affect both the expression of such affects on part of the informant, our interpretation of them and the affects themselves, and thus such factors are relevant to interpretation of the account of the informant, we have included a short description of each informant that includes some or all of these factors.

It might be appropriate also to mention the fact that a researchers choice of topics and field reflects personal interest. Our interest in Samoa is supported by our sense of worry about the course that the Western world is on, leading us to look for answers on how to create a sustainable society elsewhere. It has also been important for us to visit a country that does not seem to be plagued by hunger or acute misery and that offers another perspective on poverty, intended as lack of material possessions.

#### **4.2. Material**

This thesis is partly based on an eight-week long field study in Samoa carried out from the midst of September to the midst of November in 2010, and partly on a literature study. The material we gathered on the field study consists of 19 semi-structured deep interviews around 1-2 hours each, numerous unstructured deep interviews, for example at bars or during a taxi ride (one should mention that driving a taxi seemed not primarily to be a way to support oneself or one's family, but rather a way to meet people and to gather money for gas to be able to drive around the city in one's car; worth noting is that there were several times when a taxi forbore to pick us up, with another taxi driver later stating that he drove people "only for gas"), and of newspaper articles and books that we got hold of during our stay. We also gathered information through participant observation, in particular by joining the local soccer team.

The material is gathered mainly in the capital city, Apia, since this is where we spent seven out of the eight weeks of our stay in Samoa. There we made semi-structured interviews with four local women aged 20-30 years old, one man around 20 years of age, two local women aged 40-50 years old, two high chiefs



who were men aged 40-50, two *fa'afafines*, that is, the Samoan version of transsexual or gay people, around 30 years old, one representative for the Samoan housing Corporation and one representative for an anti-rape-group, one interview with the Chief of Police and one with the Prime Minister Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi; two foreigners were also interviewed: one Italian woman and one Swiss man that had moved to Samoa five years ago and 19 years ago respectively. We also spent one week in Manase, a smaller village at the bigger island of Savaii, where we conducted one semi-structured interview with the local Samoan 80-years old priest.

The semi-structured interviews were all captured on camera, except in the case of two interviews out of which were recorded only sound, since the informants did not wish to appear on camera. Also a lot of material from the participant observation was captured on film and sound.

## 5. Results

In our formal and casual interviews with informants in Samoa, we have focused on trying to identify psychological affects to land as well as information about LTRA and the legal and economical system of land ownership and access to land in Samoa. The joining of a youth soccer team provided us with specific insights in youth culture and life style in Samoa, on the values and ways of thinking and living of a generation of Samoans grown up in the clash between modern, Westernized values and practises such as those are transferred through modern media such as cinema, tv and internet, the cash economy, the parliamentary system, and the traditional *Fa'a Samoa* such as this is practised for example in the form of traditional decisionmaking in the villages and in the *aigas*, traditional division of labour, the values and practises of the *matai* system and the identity shaping processes of the relations within family and to the family land. We will below focus on the observations and interviews we felt were the most informative in regards to Samoan psychological affects to land and the place of

land and the fruits of the land inside the system of sharing economics that is the *Fa'a Samoa*.

### 5.1. The Samoan psychological affects to land – The informants' responses

All informants heavily stress family as the center of the Samoan culture and system, and most explicitly refer to family as the heart of the *Fa'a Samoa*. The feeling of belonging to a family emerges from their accounts as a cornerstone of identity and self-definition, but the concept of family also carries economical and social obligations, such as the need to work for the family and the duty to respect elders, parents and chiefs. There is some implication in the accounts of a strong social incentive to conform to the family's expectation and norms, and also of presenting oneself and the family in a most favorable way to outsiders.

The majority of the informants mention God, generally in terms of pointing out their, their family's and their fellow Samoans' dedication to and love for God or referring to Samoa as being founded on God, and refer to God as the giver of the land. The concept of gratitude to God appears to be central to their self-image and possibly thereby to their sense of identity, as well as to their family values and sense of belonging, and the concept of God heavily linked to the idea of Samoa itself, both as a state and a natural environment.

The two concepts of family and God are brought up spontaneously as central by all the informants who mention them, and thus are less likely to be affected by courtesy bias. They undeniably, though, leave the listener with a feeling of this being the socially most accepted way of presenting oneself and Samoa to an outsider, since the wordings and phrasings of the different informants are so similar.

All of the informants also refuse the notion of Samoa as a poor country, most often referring directly or indirectly to land, generally in the form of stressing the land's fertility and the abundance of the crops it grows, as well as referring to the

system of sharing economics which dictates that within a family, all resources and possessions are communal and between families, asking for help means sharing of resources is effectuated in a give-and-take system where one gives when one has, and therefore a poorer family can go on living on a richer family; however, if the former one day should become wealthy, they are obliged to give back.

The prohibition to sell land is referred to by many of the informants, and they strongly refuse the idea of selling their own land. The reason given for this is not that selling land is illegal but that the land is given by the ancestors and thus should be cherished. The informants also express a desire to pass this specific piece of land to their children and their children's children. The land is strongly linked to the families ties for both economical, emotional and spiritual reasons, being at once a source of subsistence and income, a place intensely and repeatedly referred as "ours", "our land" and "belonging to us", and a spiritual link to the ancestors, who named it, to the deceased members of the family, who are buried on it, and to the future members of the family, to whom it will be passed and for whom it is needed to be well tended to, kept and guarded.

Though the ancestors seem to be the givers of the family land, to the specific place or environment which is considered "our family land", God is referred to as the giver of Nature itself, and when speaking of this, the informants are clearly referring to nature in a more general and abstract way, than what is the case of the family land.

The interview questionnaires regarding perceptions of and feelings connected to land was created during the first weeks of our stay in Samoa, under influence of our hypothesis that the Samoans perceived the land as animated in the sense of inhabited by the spiritual remains of the ancestor after whom the land was named and, possibly, by other ancestors too, as the former research in Samoa we had studied had taught us that the deceased members of the family are buried on family land and that in Samoan traditional culture, various places are perceived as inhabited by *aitus*, ghosts, and also, that the traditional Polynesian concept of

land ownership was that land could not be owned by people and that instead the “people belong to the land.” As our interviews proceeded we noticed that certain questions, particularly the ones regarding the presumed inhabitation of ancestor spirits *in* the land, and of *aitus*, ghosts, were useless to ask since informants did not take them seriously – and that insisting on these questions created discomfort and ridicule such that it risked damaging the confidence between us and the informants, and therefore, our ability to research more in depth the spiritual and psychological connotations of land in the sense of being “inhabited” by spirits has been more limited than was our intention as to when we formulated our research questions.

Below, we have chosen to summarize and present selected quotes from what we find to be the most relevant interviews, in regards to enlightening our research questions. They are presented below together with the informants giving them.

The pastor Siwewano of the village of Manase, Savaii, in his seventies:

The pastor Siwewano says that Samoans “before the arrival of Christianity worshipped the big stones, big trees” and that they “believed that there must be power living in those.” He also says that now, under Christianity, the Samoans believe that the land and nature of Samoa itself, with its vegetation and crops, is their heritage given from God and a gift for which they must be thankful. God gives the food, he is the giver of all plants and trees that the Samoans depend on for surviving, which he lists as the taro, yam, breadfruit, coconuts, and other crops. He says that the Samoan economy is not good, but the natural resources and the environment, aka the land and these crops, means Samoans can always eat and therefore are not poor in the sense of hunger. This is also thanks to the Samoan system of sharing of food – “you can go to the house of your neighbor, you can eat there. This is another part of a custom, our custom” – which he connects to the feeling of thankfulness to God. He tells us that people believe in demons and bad spirits who are trying to overcome the power of God, and confirms that these are called *aitus*, and that it’s an old concept stemming from the pre-Christian epoch. He confirms that “customary land, you’re not allowed to sell. Because that is a land according to the customs, they have a relation with a custom. Their own heritage from ancestors, something that they have to stay and

live on it.” He confirms that customary lands are named after the ancestors of the family and that deceased family members are buried on the land: “Those who have their own customary land, you see, they prefer to bury their own fathers and mothers, ancestors near their own house, within their own land” and that this is because new “generations will come and when time comes for them to pass away their children will come over to inherit the family and they see, they see their grandfathers and their ancestors, even though they know they are already dead. [...] they are with them, you see?”

Raci Adams, a business woman in Apia, in her fifties:

Raci Adams says that “all the Samoan families have their own lands” which is “given to each family from their ancestors”. Her family own private lands, so called freehold land, which they work on, and she tells us that customary lands is an arrangement occurring in the villages. Her husband is a *matai* and on his side of the family, they have access to customary lands but do not use it since they own private land. She would never sell her lands, since it came from her ancestors. The family always lived on the same piece of land and she will give the land to her children. Her ancestors are important to her, and she feels connected to them and that they are always present in her life, spiritwise. She feels the land belongs to her and her family and that they and their ancestors belong to the land, and she would never sell it. Even if she would be prepared to sell it and someone else who is not of the family would buy it, this person would not belong to it. She says that the land is “Something that you will never give it away, it sort of ah, how do you say, it brings a lot of memories from your ancestors and stuff like that, it means that if you sell that, it means that you have no respect for your ancestors”. She first says that you are allowed to do anything to your land, and gives the examples such as to grow trees or vegetables or build a house, as long as you don’t sell it, as long as it stays in the family, but then when asked if that includes destroying the land, says that this would not be acceptable and that one has to treat the land well, that “it was given to you, you have to treat it with respect”. She says the land was given to you by God. She says her favorite place in nature is her garden and the greenhouse she also owns and runs as a business, that she thinks “I’ll get sick if I didn’t play around with my plants”. When asked

what she thinks is man's relationship to nature, she says that: "God created everything and at the end, everything has to go back to God." and that "The earth is given to us, so it depends on us how we treat it...you know? It's just...It's our responsibility to take care of it, we have to take care of everything."

Sipi Salanoa, *matai* in Apia, in his thirties:

Salanoa is a chef and architect who has returned to become a *matai* of his family after having lived his whole adult life abroad. He tells us how the *matai* system works and how the economical system of sharing is organized. He says that "Samoa is very family oriented, everything is based around a family" and that "here in Samoa, you don't have a job and you still get fed". He tells us that the *matai* owns the land and that all family members are allowed to live on it, not paying any rent, but that everyone has to contribute with work on the land. "It's common sense, when you're living on the land and you grow things, that you contribute something to the family." He paints a picture of the economics of sharing between families by saying that "Now, in Samoan culture, when we give, we will give some back, and then, if we're genuine, we'll give it back, but at the same time, it would be rude not to accept generosity that has been given back to us, so you always have to come to a common ground" but also that "in the *Fa'a Samoa* culture, when you ask, you receive. So if you gonna go into somebody's land, you know, you ask, sure enough they're gonna say, 'Sure, go, get yourself something to eat!', but if you gonna go and jump the fence, of course, you gonna get a machete on your head!" He also tells us that the land belongs to the families, but the forest belongs to the villages.

Mark Sione, a young man taking care of his grandparents, in his twenties:

Mark says that in Samoa, family always comes first and that you have to respect your elders. His family has lands, big plantations, but he, unlike many of his family members, does not work on them as he works with taking care of his grandparents. He tells us the various lands has names, gives us two of them and when asked where the names come from, answers that "my greatgreat grandbrother, like my grandfather, he's the one that name all those things". He says that land is "a very important family belonging in Samoa" and that the

family land is “the major property in his family”. He says they’ve had many court cases about the lands, to protect it from being taken by others, and stresses how important it is for the family to continue holding the land. He also says regarding the name of the family land being related to things that happened in the family history that “my dad he's the best one of describing all the stuff, yeah, he's the man of that. That's why he won a lot of court cases cause he's got like right informations of why we call that village name what why we call that place name, why we call that place, why we name that place and how, how we name and why, the reason why”. He says knowing the history of the family land “it's just another way to support your experience of like, where the lands come from, like, the real information about the land, history of that land, yeah, it should be, it should be the one that owns that land and that's why my dad, my dad won it, won that, because you know, he owns the land and he knows the history from his great grandfather, great great grandfather or greatgreat grandfather and his father, yeah they've been passing over their story to my father till like since from old days to my dad now, yeah that's why.” His father is a *tulafale matai* and a reverend and Mark refers to him as the one who “owns all the lands” in the village. He also describes his dad as very generous, inviting his friends as well as homeless people to stay on their family lands. He says it's very important for the family to live together on the family lands, in the same village and that it's “a very important thing to us, holding our lands, no one's gonna take it, cause you know what my mom and my dad say, when they pass away and the next generation will come up, they can still have this land, so when they, when this generation pass on, and then another, yeah our greatgreatgreat grandchildren or whatever, will come up and there's still this land, they don't need anything to, they don't need anything to, what I mean like, they don't have, they'll not suffer when they get older, they got lands for free, they still got everything for free, they're free to live here”. He says he would get angry if his children and grandchildren would not have the land, also because that would mean they probably would have to spend a lot of money and going through trouble getting hold of land. He says it's important to live in the same way as one's ancestors, since they worked hard and fought for the land and it's thanks to them that they have what they have and do not suffer. To “stay family” land is the way to respect them. The family land and

the ancestors are related. He underlines that his family would never ever sell their land. He says all Samoans own nature, and that this is why they never get poor. He also confirms that the forests in the hill belongs to the whole villages, not families, and that every villager can go there to hunt. He says the land is created by God for the benefit of people and animals. He also says the land “has feelings, 'cause the thing is, you can tell, if, if you don't use like chemicals here, like for example this little area, if you plant a taro here, without using chemical, it keeps growing and big, and wow, but if you use that taro and you like between all the, putting chemicals like every time, every time, sometimes you can't even grow, you try to grow like, it can't grow up, it just grow up and it can't, like not growing well. Yeah, that's why I can tell, it has feeling as well, if someone use more chemical, the land say something like, ah, I'm feel sick, I'm not pretty good to help you out to grow, your, your taro, I'm not good enough to support your taro...”, although he confirms his family use chemicals on the land. He says that his family doesn't have to buy vegetables since they grow all vegetables needed and thus get them for free. He says plants are all special to him, and his favorite animal is a cow, and that's because it can be sold or slaughtered and thereby turned to money or food. He believes that both animals and plants, as well as the ocean and nature in its totality, have feelings, but only animals have souls, and that God created everything.

Unasa Va'a, an anthropologist at the National University of Samoa, in his sixties: Unasa Va'a says that “traditionally the economy is a subsistence one, and it still is, a lot of people in Samoa still depend on subsistence, meaning they depend on the fruits of the land and from what they harvest from the seas.” He also says that “cash economy is very strong in Samoa” because of tourism and remittances, which together amounts to half of the GDP. He says that 80 % of the land is still communally owned, and cannot be sold. It can be leased for development purposes, but there's a limitation in years for this. He says that in the villages people are living on subsistence agriculture and depend on the food of the plantation and from the sea, and he estimates that 80 % of the population still live in the villages. He says that “People here don't starve because if your relative is without a help, without food, you know we are under obligation to help our



relatives so the system works with very few exceptions, generally it works very well.” He also says this kinship system, or system of kinship obligation, which is still strong and working, is the strength of Samoan culture. Though survival is based on subsistence agriculture, people do need cash for products like butter, sugar and flour. He lives in Apia and holds a title in a village, but doesn’t exploit the resources of the land in the village, while he does look after his family in the village, and helps them with money. There are no taxes on land or land rent on customary land. He also says that the secret of the system is that the “kinship bonds are still strong”, though “we’re beginning to change to, and the thing that’s stopping it is because of the government is holding back on the land, because the land goes with the culture.” He says that “I think it is the kinship system and the land, the land ownership, I think those are the crucial factors” and that “if the government changes the land ownership system, you know, like, they open it up for sale, you know what’s gonna happen, they open it up for sale, a lot of rich people just wanna own an island, or a portion of an island, you know, in no time, this will all be bought up, by American millionaires, and then where are you? And that’s the problem, and that’s why the people want to hold on to their lands, you know, because, that’s their protection.” He says that of the LTRA “that’s not affecting the land ownership, that only has to do with registration of lands, that you no longer need a piece of paper, a deed system, ah, that all you need now is just to register it in the central registry, that’s all it is.” and that if the law meant that people risked losing their customary lands “the whole place would be up in a civil war..!” He says regarding the land that “there always is a spiritual dimension to the land, you know, the land of your ancestors, and you know, the departed ancestors, and yeah, that’s always the case, yeah. Although now, it’s, everybody perceives it as Christian religion, you know, but still the fact is it is still the same kind of thing, religion is religion.”

Tara, a *fa’afafine*, in her thirties:

Tara says that she is a *fa’afafine* – the Samoan traditional term for an LGBTQ person – and that she as such is a “guardian of man and female souls”, that “it’s connected to the family, the society, also to the contradictions”, that *fa’afafines* are an integral part of the Samoan heritage and culture, and that as “guardian of

traditions and of the culture, it is a spiritual role". She says that the *fa'afafines* are very accepted in the modern Samoan society, even though there are problems, many of them stemming from the churches. She says however that "there's never been any violence against *fa'afafines*" and that "Samoa is not violent about this, it's violent about land instead".

Apoa, *matai*, in his fifties:

Apoa says that "The *matai* is the head of the family. But the owner of the land is the family. You are a member of the family, and the family select you to be their *matai*." His responsibilities are also to listen to the family members, support them, solve conflicts, and to organize the sharing of ideas and resources. He says that his own family is "not a high big family, but maybe more than 200 people or so." He confirms that the Samoan system of sharing works and that the people "share anything you need."

Christian, a Swiss man living in Samoa since 19 years, in his fifties:

Christian says that Europeans generally misunderstand poverty as "Europeans normally think it's because they have no clothes or something, therefore they are underdeveloped, that's not the problem" and that in Samoa, there is no starvation, but there is malnutrition, as well as gigantic health problems such as diabetes. He says that "the society is very clan orientated" and that it is very difficult to really become integrated in the society as a foreigner. He stresses family ties as the fundamental feature of the culture and feels that Europeans lack the sense of belonging and identity that the large families confer on the Samoans, a feeling he expresses as "*you are not alone*". He also says that the Samoans believe in *aitus*, ghosts or nature spirits that are linked to special places, even though this is not generally liked to talk about. He mentions examples of a cultural obligation to show off wealth when one has it, but when it has been shown, it must also be shared with the person it was shown to, and that giving confers status upon the giver and that the more important the person, the more he or she wields, the more he or she has to give, but that it's also always a give and take and a circulation. He also says that "if it comes to decision making, yeah, in matters, land matters, family matters, particularly if it comes to land, the

oldest sister of the title holder, so all the sisters of a *matai*, is very important, she have a big say in it, so he can hardly do anything without her agreement.”

Fiu Matai Elisara, environmentalist, in his sixties:

Fiu is an internationally engaged environmentalist who has been fighting the LTRA. His organization deals with sustainable development issues, dealing with issues of economic development, but more particularly on how the “economic development impact on the social lives of the people about social equity, but also in terms of how those economic development is exploiting and manipulating our natural resources.”, as well as with cultural diversity. He says that the biggest problem in this regards that he sees in Samoa today is “the political will of all governments to actually accept the notion of sustainable development. A lot of our, of our so-called development agenda of this country is very much linked to the economic agendas of other countries that are helping Samoa.” He says that “one of major examples of that is the way that our government has now in 2008 passed that what they called the Land and Titles Registration Act 2008. While our governments still continue to tell our people that our Constitution still protects the alienation of customary lands, whereas we have consulted with some very prominent lawyers, very astute constitutional lawyers, who have very well recognized academic qualifications from Harvard Universities and those other universities around the world and they are quite confident that this is not the case. I'm advocating that it's a pity that our governments continue to, well if I can use the word, to lie to our people when saying that, you know, your land, customary lands are still protected by the Constitution on article 102 of our Constitution. Whereas in fact, the land titles registration act has now introduced the freehold system of land registration into this country, which is good for freehold land, 'cause we have 80-81% of our lands on the customary land tenure. And that's where our concern is because once you start to register our customary lands under a freehold system title of registration, free simple title registration, it defeats and destroy the cultural nature and the customary nature of our land tenure system, where no one individual can own 81% of our customary lands. Every Samoan has ownership of that and has a ... they can actually claim, make claim to those lands as having a right to exist of those lands.

Whereas that Land Act in Land Titles Registration Act in 2008, now seems to envelop not only the 19% of freehold land and public lands into that type of registration system, but in it in facts according to our legal advisors has actually also allowed the registration of, of customary lands and by doing that it now exposes to being part of collaterals on mortgages and investors interest and of course once that had a spot of an economic model we would certainly without doubt lose who all that land for the, for the future. And of course we, we take it very seriously because it's our responsibility to maintain that for all children of the, of the future, and of course it's continue to say it's bad enough to be colonized by foreigners, but it's unforgivable and it's quite criminal really for our leaders to be colonizing our own peoples." He says the issue is the same all over the Pacific, and that the legal changes are introduced at the behest of the international investors "Because it's an investment security for them, because a lot of their investment are done on lands and of course if they don't have any security to ownership of lands and the control of our customary lands that is not going to be secure investment in terms of the returns that they would get out, so of course they have influenced all government policies to make sure that they do get that security of tenure in terms of our customary lands." He says that "we have very clear, clear agreement and commitments by our governments to Asian Development Bank, Australia, World Bank, for example, that they will do something about our land tenure systems that they think are inhibiting economic development and investments in our countries, so it's private facing evidence that our governments unfortunately are still lying to our people." He explains the difference between the old system and the system introduced by the LTRA in that "before the this Land Titles Registrations Act 2008 we used to use the what we call "the deed system" of land registration, whereby any claims to assert land of course you will go to the registrar's office and get a confirmation of ownership of that land, but if that ownership of land is queried by other people, as being floored or even false, then the deed system actually allows you to actually pursue the question of legitimacy of ownership. Now with the land and titles registrations act and the torrent system, that does not allow you to go back to actually trace that sequence or the sequence of ownership to make sure that you, you come at the end and legitimately say that "I am the owner", the fee simple I

mean the owner of a title of land. Whereas this system, you know, the worst thing is the indefensibility of title. The torrent system promotes the concept of indefensibility of title, your title as appear on the certificate of title is indefensible, so nobody can actually challenge that because once your name appears on a certificate of title, you are the owner of that land, you know, and therefore, but the worst thing is too is that the whole legal system actually they support that ownership of land by the mere fact that you or your name appears on that certificate of title and therefore all the questions of, you know, pursuing legitimacy, unfortunately, no longer, no longer applies. And once you have that, it's okay for, as I said, it's okay for the freehold land and for fee simple title, but for customary lands it's a different concept altogether, because when you're *matai* or a chief in a village you basically are there in trust for the collective family, the collective family come together and actually select you as your chief and therefore your, the fact that you become a chief does not give you, you know, supreme title to basically do what you want with the land and with the people that elected you in the first place. It's a very very democratic system, but you basically run the family as your family and use the land for the benefit of the family, you, collectively the family also serve you, but basically they serve you because you're a good leader and being, and you equally think about your, the benefit to all the members of your family, you equitably share the benefits, but you also think seriously about the collecting benefit economically and, and social benefits to, to all your family, so that's the concept of the cultural, our cultural ownership of lands. But now once, you see, the torrent system does not recognize that principle of collective ownership, it only, it only recognize your individual ownership of land. So, the danger here now is that, okay the *matai* or the chief, his name will actually appear on the certificate of title and therefore the collective ownership of the lands and that, it's not even recognized in that certificate of title, it's actually owned in the legal definition, it's actually owned and managed and owned by this one individual, whose name appears on the title and therefore it defeats the whole cultural system in a vote, this one person can actually do whatever they, he likes with the lands that belong to his people.”

Tuilaepa Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of

Samoa:

The prime minister of Samoa gracefully granted us an interview and in the response to the question of what LTRA was about answered that “Most of the lands in Samoa are customary owned. These customary lands are under the control of the head *matai*. [...] He is only a custodian, that takes care of the land to ensure that every member is provided with some land to cultivate, that no person is left without. It is wrong for the top *matai* to try and monopolize the use of all the lands to himself and his close relative, that sense of selfishness is not permitted under our customs. Even *matai* tends to abuse his control of the land, then it is justifiable for the heirs of the title to go and ask the Land and Titles Court to take away the title from him.” “That is why when you exercise as the head *matai*, the power of custodian of the customary lands belonging to the family, he needs to exercise that power with extreme care. And of course, there’s some bad *matais*, it doesn’t mean that we have a perfect system, there are also bad *matais*, evil *matais*, who are product of human weakness, who will try to clean lands for his own use, especially by himself and his offsprings. That should automatically activate the other heirs to begin the process through the Land and Titles Court to remove him. There are many lands in Samoa that are not properly utilized, not properly cultivated and it is the reason why we are trying as a government to put into law the means by which the custodians of customary lands can lease out the land, outside of the family circle to business people, who may wish to develop the land, to build hotel, to build commercial development or any other business development that would put that land on more commercial use. It is the reason why we decided several years ago to have reforms of our land system, in which business people would be given the opportunity to develop customary lands on long-term leases. That aid is now passed.” He says the LTRA doesn’t change the essence of the custodianship nature, that is, the responsibility of the *matai* over customary lands. “Head *matai* only looks after and takes care of the customary land for the benefit of all the clan. He does not own them.” He also says that “The biggest development opportunity for us comes from tourism”, and that he feels that “tourists who want to visit us and to experience life of the Samoans, the life style, the way we live, the way we think and that is an area of tourism that want to see developing”. He says that the

economical sector in Samoa that needs development the most is agriculture, where Samoa has its greatest natural resources.

## 5.2. Catching sight of oneself through the Other – The participant observation

It is an expression of great poverty when people need lots of possessions, because it proves that they lack the things that are of the Great Spirit.

- Erich Scheurmann (1988: 62; our translation)

We also applied the method of participant observation to our field study in Samoa, and we have several hours of filmed material that are observation of phenomena, environments and landscape in Samoa.

As regards to the ecological and economical sustainability of the system, it is of course hard to draw any conclusions from an observation, as a foreigner, which lasts solely for eight weeks. However, we did note that the city of Apia and many villages did not exhibit typical signs of poverty slums, but instead that gardens and fields were well-ordered and well-kept and buildings well-managed. Several building projects, also of large, potentially expensive buildings such as schools and churches, were underway. An active building sector is generally a sign of investment being made and of an economy which is not in stagnation or crisis. We also noted that though former research has indicated a huge problem with the Samoan dependency on imported foods, the fruit- and vegetable- and fish markets in Apia were both huge, several times larger than the largest supermarket, and dominated by domestic products. We saw well-kept plantations as well as abundance of freeranging, seemingly well-nourished animals such as pigs and hens, though cattle was almost entirely lacking. On our several excursions across the islands by car, we saw no signs of ecological damage such as erosion or large cutovers, though this does not mean that such damage was not present, especially in other forms that we would not have been able to discern by mere eye.

On a cultural note, in regards to the psychological affects and affinity to land and nature, we noted that nature motifs, especially plant and flower motifs, were very frequent in arts and crafts, as well as on clothes prints, articles of daily use and jewellery. Real and artificial flowers were abundant as decorations in homes, hotels, restaurants, churches and public buildings, often adorning places where they would not usually be found in the West, such as sinks and toilets, as well as being the most frequent used accessory of Samoan women, usually carried as a hair decoration behind one ear. One of our informants adorned us with flowers in our hairs before we accompanied her to her church, the young daughter of one of our informants carefully made sure her mother had a flower in her hair when being interviewed, and as we were leaving Samoa, we received flower hair decorations as a gift from a couple of our informants.

While trying to gain as much understanding as possible regarding the social system and norms, we benefited hugely from our joining the local youth soccer team in Apia, named Apia Youth, already on our first week in Samoa. Being part of the team for the entire period of our stay in Samoa helped us to get closer to people than we would have become if not part of a team, and to socialize with young Samoans in an everyday setting, where we were, while still foreigners, yet participating in a collective of sorts, enabling us to take part of social norms and behaviour in a higher degree than just that of the researcher. On the soccer field, as well as in other situations when hanging out with the team, the courtesy bias tended to be less notable than in other situations, and interaction seemingly cruder and more genuine. When, on the occasion of the first game, we asked “Who’s the captain of this soccer team?” – to know who to turn to and look for directions in the heat of the competition, teammate and informant, with a puzzled look and gentle tone, answered: “We all are”, we were given our first touch of Samoan collective spirit. Curiously enough, this teammate later turned out to be the de facto captain of the team, if not the de jure one. We understood we were at first given honour positions within the team as a gesture of courtesy, and notable relief was encountered among our team mates when one of us, upon a discovery of inadequacy, resigned the position of center in favour of a, for the team as a



whole, less damaging wing position. A feeling that gifts were supposed to be reciprocated and then redistributed for the maximum benefit to the collective hereby came along. Winning was stated as the goal – even though unfortunately the team never did. In its last game, Apia Youth was able to score one goal and finish even, which felt like a victory. But even more so was a feeling of bonding and collective identity in the team, expressed mainly through joking, bragging and partying together. The trainings were very important and missing one was met with disappointment and displeasure, but while at the trainings, those seemed more like relaxed occasions to socialize and hang out than truly aimed at bettering the performance of the team. On the field, each player playing for solo glory was overwhelmingly more common than true team playing. A curious mix of almost exhibitionistic individualism and one at the same time intense and relaxed collective identity thus seemed to be a distinguishing feature of the Samoan soccer player. Perhaps a performance-driven individualism is allowed and encouraged to bloom, since the collective identity is so strong and so grounded in the culture that individualism in performance does not threaten it and therefore needs not be restrained for collective identity to be formed? Especially if the individual's good performance enhance the glory of the group since the individual himself is first and foremost defined as a member of a group, and the norms of the group does not primarily foster competition between members of the same group but between different groups. This would be consistent with the habit of many Samoans we met to introduce themselves together with a list of the achievements they have accomplished, with delimiters of their family and finally with praise of Samoa itself and Samoans in general. This way of presenting oneself struck us as a cultural speech habit very different from that of Europeans, and one that was difficult at first to get used to, pointing out to us our own cultural habits of speech and our instinctive, at first, we regretfully say, averse reactions to patterns of speech and presentation that differs from those of our own.

We also realized that we have biases. The noble savage bias that we had harboured when choosing Samoa as our field study and when studying what we now feel to be idealized accounts of the Samoan culture became increasingly

clear to us as the study progressed. An illustrating example is being informed, by Christian, that one of those idealised accounts – the book *Papalagi* – was actually not the work of a Samoan chief, as we had read in another of the idealised accounts, nor the retelling of discourses from said chief by a German explorer, but the pure fabrication of the German explorer himself, Erich Scheurmann. Our unstructured interviews with UN representatives informed us of the fact that UN works in this way: their research is often conducted through writing a report about the reports they've been reading, reports by other UN representatives. We also noted that the fact that Westerners are noted to harbour this bias of the noble savage seemed to be well known and sometimes played upon by the Samoans, as we were repeatedly told things along the lines of how Samoa was a spiritual destination for foreigners, Samoans allwise and good, and Samoa more generally, a fullblown paradise. We realized our longing for an ecologist's utopia, our desire to find an alternate economical and ecological model to that of the Western world, together with the Samoan courtesy bias and the Samoan cultural pride, might have induced us to accept the thesis that Samoa is not poor, both when we studied the former research and when we conducted interviews. Experiencing the hermeneutical spiral first hand - as applied to our experience with the book *Papalagi* – has resulted in us catching sight of our noble savage bias, and, hopefully, being somewhat more aware of it, has somewhat diminished its hold over us, all along the lines of reflexive ethnographic thoughts about the effect of the study on the researcher.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1. Cultural change – the death of a culture?

#### 6.1.1. The *Fa'a Samoa* – a systemic approach

*E le soifua umi le tagata fa'atau fanua*

(The man who sells family land will not live to an old age - devils will bring about his early death)

- Samoan proverb

The abolishment of the *Fa'a Samoa* would work on several levels; firstly, there is the aspect of the family selling the land and splitting the money, thereby dissolving the enforced family ties and the family cooperation that Professor Va'a feels is the heart of his culture. When not forced to cooperate economically, the family ties will become weaker and plausibly cause the system of economical sharing to break apart. Further, the inalienable land is a prerequisite for the sense of *belonging*, which is very strong among the Samoans.

Secondly, in Samoa the owning of family land, that is, the owning of customary lands, is connected to and dependent on the ability of the concerned person to account for the family history; its relations and stories, all the way back to the mythical semi-divine ancestor. A law change will eradicate one great incentive to remember and account for family history, to transfer stories concerning lands and prospectively of the retelling of cultural myths. Note that the retelling of the myths has *direct* empirically measurable effects in the way that the remembrance of the family stories and its connection to Samoan mythology has key importance when claiming one's land rights. It is a very strong reason to remember and relate to family history, stories about land and the Samoan myths.

Although other islands or Polynesian cultures on islands in the Pacific in general have been quite influenced by Western culture and values, the most flagrant example being Tahiti with its canned food and black pearl production (Malm 2003), the Samoan system has been remarkably resilient to change. However, there is the risk that the abandonment of the inalienable customary land system and the plausible subsequent lack of knowledge of history, stories and myths will initiate a positive feedback loop in the *Fa'a Samoa* system, meaning that the factors having the capacity to dissolve the system will be reinforced and reinforcing of one another and may also lead to the dissolution of other key factors in the Samoan system. Another way to put it is that the inalienability of customary lands in the Samoan cultural system corresponds to the concept of

key species in an ecosystem that was discussed in chapter 2.3.. The transformation of inalienable land into alienable land would in this case correspond to the extinction of a key species in an ecosystem. This could also be described as what Bateson, when speaking about information systems, calls "a difference which makes a difference" (Bateson 1987: 276). In evolutionary biology this type of fundamental change corresponds to evolution of a new species due to a mutation, in philosophy perhaps to free will, in literature to concepts such as Tolkien's "even a small person can change the course of history", while in myths or archetypal theory, it is represented by the trickster figure and the usually following new order of things or new paradigm, of which one of the most well known is Prometheus, stealing fire from the Gods.

Even though Samoa in the past has been shown to be very resilient towards cultural changes, having been able to import several Western concepts such as Western cash money economy without losing the core of its culture, such a fundamental change as making the alienation of land legally possible would, according to us, be the type of change that would pressure the system beyond what we could call its *cultural carrying capacity*; that is, the maximum amount of changes that a system can absorb while still matching our fundamental description of it. That is, the input or changes the system can manage while still being recognizable, in the meaning that it can still be described in the way that we have chosen to describe it, with the components we have defined as its important parts, within the boundaries which we have chosen. Further down we will see how the process of positive feedback loops could lead to a system collapse if myths, stories, taboos and rituals would be forgotten.

### 6.1.2. Myths as maps

He [modern man] has freed himself from 'superstition' (or so he believes), but in the process he has lost his spiritual values to a positively dangerous degree. His moral and spiritual tradition has disintegrated, and he is now paying the price for this break-up in worldwide disorientation and dissociation.

- Jung (2008: 97)

We argue that myths, stories and rituals provide *maps* for the interpretation of the human condition and position in nature and society. Myths create stories that reinforce, explain or invest meaning in limits (aka taboos) – (see for example Rappaport 1968: 2f), carefully outlining the fact that there are limits and that human beings have to accept them even though they are not easily understood. What myths especially teach are the lesson about the consequences of not accepting those limits, thus functioning as a psychological teacher and a step-by-step treatment of what Freud (Freud et al. 1984: 291) calls “the narcissistic scar” of human society, that is, the pain resulting from realizing that we are not the center of the universe. Taboos thus serve as functional limits for both the individual and the culture (compare Rappaport’s discussion of ritual in Rappaport 1968). Tcherkézoff (2008: 255f) writes that when asked about the *essence* of the *Fa’á Samoa*, a Samoan often answers in terms of taboos and duties. One of those taboos would be to sell family land.

The implication of myths as a touchstone when it comes to new waves of ideas in a culture, ideas of change, of modification, reformation or innovation, (such as the idea of the increase of efficiency by the introduction of a cash economy or by making land alienable etc.), is not far-fetched, and further elucidates the importance of myths in the cultural life-cycle and ecosystem. If myths function as a sort of moment of inertia, a cultural safety net sorting out ideas that do not comply with the overall cultural state, what happens to the cultural system if those myths disappear? What remains form the central parts of a culture that has lost its stories?

### 6.1.3. Your epistemology<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bateson & Bateson (1988b: 93f) defines this as follows: ” your machinery of perception, how you perceive, is governed by a system of presuppositions I call your epistemology: a whole philosophy deep in your mind but beyond your consciousness.

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thru chinks of his cavern.

- William Blake, The marriage of heaven and hell 1790

As mentioned in chapter 2.2., Ingold argues that cultural variations in the way people relate to nature are due to variations in skill, that is, an ability of attention (Ingold 2000). This ability of attention is trained since early childhood and is therefore dependent on the natural and cultural environment, in which a person grows up. Since this ability of attention eventually or rather per diem becomes unconscious (Nørretranders 1993: 241-285), when a person is “not seeing” something, it is not possible for that person to just consciously decide to start “seeing” that same thing. A striking example of this is the anthropologist Turnbull’s work, as referenced in Nørretranders (1993: 253), with a group of pygmées in Kongo, living their whole life in the forest. Since growing up in the forest means no encounters with open country, the pygmées had no reason nor possibility to develop a judgement of size of things from a far away distance. Being brought to watch buffaloes from a distance on an open field, one of the pygmées asked what kind of insects it was that he saw. When Turnbull told him they were buffaloes, the pygmé thought him to be joking. Watching the buffaloes grow bigger as they approached, the pygmé believed the whole thing to be a magical trick; he had no experience of watching things from a great distance and could therefore not “see” that the small insects were actually the buffaloes seen from a great distance. The pygmé thus did not have the skill, that is, skill in Ingold’s meaning of the word, of interpreting perspective. The lack of *cultural training of skill*, that is, the lack of *cultural training of awareness* or *consciousness*, in seeing a thing in a certain way, in this case makes the seeing impossible.

This cultural training of skill would be dependent on all parts of the culture in which a person grows up, par exemple, a person’s view on land is formed by the culture’s laws concerning land, written and unwritten, by in what way land is used to provide food and people’s treatment of the land, by how land is treated in religion, stories and myths, by what is considered to be land, by how it is named and categorized in the local language, etc.. All these things will influence a

person's cultural training of awareness or consciousness, or skill, concerning land. Should some part or parts of the conditions or background for a person's cultural training of skill change, the person will not acquire the same skill as he or she would have had the conditions not changed.

In many myths, material from the cultural and ecological environment where the myths are told is used (Parkin 2005: 213). The underlying structure of myths in different cultures may be the same (see Campbell 2011), but the way the myths are told might differ (compare symbols or different archetypes taking different shape in different cultures, for example in Cooper et al. 1987). Myths are in this way both universal and culture-specific.

As a consequence of this, we might never understand other people's myths in the same way we understand our own culture's myths. Our own cultural background, our *skill*, helps us to decipher and understand our own myths. The myths have, as Ingold argues about stories, "[...]both transparency and depth; transparency, because one can see into it; depth, because the more one looks the further one sees." (Ingold 2000: 56). Thus, the more you know about a culture, also about your own culture, the more you will understand the myths of your culture, their messages, and how they affect you and affect the culture itself.

Rappaport argued that ritual can function as a regulating mechanism that regulates the relationship between people and their environment (Rappaport 1968: 4). Ritual, that is, practices having symbolic, religious or mythological meaning, is thus an important part in developing a cultural-specific skill.

#### 6.1.4. It is only a story...

The greatest achievement of the devil has been to convince people that he does not exist.

-Baudelaire

We believe that to ignore or overlook the symbolic or psychological meanings of myths is potentially dangerous in all cultures, and argue that the misinterpretation of mythos as a factual account as well as the literal interpretation of myth, that is, the alienation from myth, are consequences of lacking the appropriate strategies for interpretation and of not being aware of the fact that these strategies are lacking. A sane strategy of interpretation is in this case not possible, because one is not even aware (of the fact) that the current strategy is flawed (Compare Bateson's allegory on LSD in Bateson et al. 1998: 27). Modern man cannot address the problem because he has no knowledge of the prerequisites for his delusions. He has no knowledge of the skill or strategies he is using to interpret his surroundings, because they are primarily unconscious.

Lack of skill of interpretation of one's own myths gives birth to pseudo-spiritual phenomenon such as the New Age-movement, which is a sort of sponging and a divine blend of other people's myths, all executed without the proper cultural skill that is needed for a sane – in the sense of balanced, nuanced - interpretation of myth.

As we discussed earlier, the skill needed is not possible to obtain just by (consciously) deciding to start understanding or seeing certain things, but is instead buried deep inside our unconscious and trained since early childhood.

#### **6.1.5. The parents have eaten sour grapes, but their children's mouths pucker at the taste...<sup>7</sup>**

The forgetting, negligence or loss of Samoan myths and stories would create a rupture between person and culture, especially in the next generation of Samoans, who will grow up in a storyless place, that is, with no map for interpretation of their life conditions and culture, and, imperatively, with no final outpost to confirm or reassure – or contradict! – their sense of place or

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<sup>7</sup> Bateson (1998: 27f) refers to this biblical quote when he talks of systemic change.



belonging; a loss of confirmation of an inner voice, or of one's deepest thoughts, one's conscience, life questions or quest for context, and possibly also in the search for meaning in life.

Absence of myths and stories means there are no – or at least less – ties connecting the Samoans to their land, to their environment, and to the *Fa'a Samoa*, "the culture". Lack of connection to the *Fa'a Samoa* in its turn means lack of understanding of the *Fa'a Samoa*, also in its economical, societal, legal and environmental aspects, in short an absence of answers to the question "Why?"; why should I share, why should I serve the *matai*, why should I not sell the family land (or my land), why can't I claim it's *my* land.

The loss of core features, which we identify as for example myths and fundamental legal structures such as the inalienability of land, in a system means that it changes in such a fundamental way that it can no longer reproduce itself. This could structurally be compared to another case in biology, the case of a dying species; while an individual in a species might still be alive, the species is dead because there is no possibility of reproduction. The transformation of inalienable land into alienable land plausibly leading to the loss of myths and stories, placelessness and rootlessness and lack of connection, in short, to *alienation*, represents a fundamental change in the Samoan system. Whether we choose to name this change an extinction of a key species, a difference that makes a difference, an effective mutation, Prometheus's theft of fire, or free will or the original sin, the point is that it all describes a change that the system cannot outlast, or, in other terms, a change that pressures the system, in our case the *Fa'a Samoa*, beyond its cultural carrying capacity. The change can potentially be positive or negative, but the point here is that, though every change, action or mutation have the potential to make a difference, some really make a difference, for good or bad. We argue that the introduction of Western concepts of land rights and ownership in Samoa is a change that will change the system, not only what's inside, but, through the process of positive feedback loops described above, by changing the rules of the system. The change thus becomes inherent at a different, higher logical level, making the possibility of going back into a dead end.

## 7. Conclusions

Our study has led to a deeper understanding of the concept of alienation, of cybernetic systems and of the human ecological triangle.

From the field study we got two main results. The first is that Samoans are more connected than Westerners, not to nature in a general sense, but to a *specific* environment, to place, to a *specific* piece of land, to a *physically identifiable* place or piece of land. In a psychological sense, they *belong*, they are rooted in a way that we in the West are generally not. The second is that with the implementation of LTRA 2008, customary lands might become alienable.

The most important conclusion we draw from the first result is that there is a *difference* between being connected to a specific environment and being connected to nature in general. From the second result of the study we draw two main conclusions. The first is that the possibility of alienation of customary lands has the potential of offsetting a fundamental transformation of how Samoans relate to and deal with land issues and also of the Samoan society and culture as a whole. Our second conclusion is that if customary lands become alienable, Samoans risk losing their connectedness with a *specific* piece of land. If so, they will become more alienated from their environment, from their culture and, lastly, from their identity as *Samoans*.

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