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LE MATUAMOEPO:

COMPETING 'SPIRITS OF GOVERNING' AND THE MANAGEMENT OF NEW ZEALAND-BASED SAMOAN YOUTH OFFENDER CASES

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN SOCIOLOGY
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EXPLANATION OF SAMOAN TITLE: *Le Matuamoepo*

The Samoan title ‘Le-Mafuamoepo’ is a Samoan metaphor that describes the ultimate portrayal of motherly love towards her young. In this metaphor the image of a mother pigeon protecting her young at night from the elements, from known and unknown hazards such as the weather and snakes, that pose a threat to the wellbeing of her young, is used to symbolise ultimate motherly love and protection. The themes of parental love, governance, protection and prevention are core to this thesis.

The phrase ‘le matuamoepo’ when broken down into component parts translate as follows: ‘Le’ meaning the singular ‘a’; ‘Matua’ meaning ‘mother, parent or elder’; and ‘moepo’ figuratively referring to the image of ‘the night’.

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1 I am indebted to Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi for offering this metaphor and its explanation.
2 The pigeon is also used in the oft-quoted Samoan saying – “O tama a manufelele e fafaga i fuga o laau, ae o tama a tagata e fafaga i upu ma tala”. This translates to mean: “The young of birds (often pigeons) are fed with flowers while the young of humans are fed with words”.
3 ‘Moepo’ can also be broken down further into its two constituent parts: ‘moe’ meaning ‘to sleep’ or ‘sleeping’ and ‘po’ meaning ‘night’. When combined the words ‘moe’ and ‘po’ take on the images of (mother pigeons) protecting or ‘standing guard’ through not ‘sleeping’ through the ‘night’. The image of *matuamoepo* is commemorated in Asau, Savaii, where the orator Fao is honorifically known as the *matuamoepo* of Tupua. *Matuamoepo*, as Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi explains, is thus also a metaphoric description for Fao’s role as protector of the Tupua residence and inheritance in Asau.
This thesis considers the 'spirits of governing' that currently frame youth justice approaches to Samoan youth offending in New Zealand today. It claims that, in the current management of Samoan youth offending cases, three main spirits of governing are in play. These are the spirits of neo-liberal risk management, cultural appropriateness, and faaSamoa. All three spirits operate simultaneously, in multi-layered and intersecting ways. Gaining insight into this complexity is critical to building an understanding of the points of tension that may arise in the operationalisation of 'culturally appropriate' youth justice policies in the case of Samoan youth offenders.

To highlight the complex character of these spirits of governing and their relationships, the thesis first describes each spirit of governing and then considers how they compete, intersect and/or diverge through a close analysis of seven youth justice cases. Analysis of each of the seven cases is based on interviews with a Samoan youth offender, a family representative, their CYFS social worker, Police youth aid officer, Youth Court youth advocate and a community intervention programme worker. The key sites of government examined in this work are those of the family, the Youth Court, the youth justice family group conference and a community intervention programme service.

The thesis reveals that to gain nuanced understanding of the complexities of managing a Samoan youth offender case, it is not simply a question of knowing what 'spirits of governing' are at play, one also needs to examine how they play. I contend that these three 'spirits' have specific relationships with each other. In youth justice, neo-liberalism opened up space for cultural appropriateness which, in turn allowed
for the circulation of the *faa*Samoan. These three ‘spirits’, however, can not be reduced to each other because of their differing understanding of governmental strategies, techniques and subjects. In particular, they differ on their understanding of the role of families, of collaboration and of cultural expertise. Consequently, for example, while these three ‘spirits of governing’ ‘agree’ on the value of cultural appropriateness, they do not ‘agree’ on how it should be defined and measured.

Too often when politically sensitive programmes or policies, such as those involving ethnic-specific cases, do not work, the response from politicians and programme personnel alike is to couch their failures in overly simplistic terms. This work seeks to indicate the importance of developing culturally nuanced models of analysis that can engage in the complexities of governing across cultural divides, in the improvement of practice in the field and in the development of a sociology capable of enhancing cross-cultural understanding.
This work is dedicated to the Samoan father of one of the Samoan youth offenders of this study who passed away before its completion and to the many New Zealand youth justice caseworkers involved in the complex management of New Zealand-based Samoan youth offender cases today. The poem below by Nina Kirifi-Alai expresses in the Samoan language the value of your work and commitment. Faafetai.

O le Matuamoepo
O le matuamoa fulufululele
E otete ma saogolele
E opopo I le saogalemu o lona fatafata
O oe o le moli o le aoa
E emoemo faasinola pea i lona olaga
Ao po- po ao pea lava pea
O oe o le sula toga ua malomaloa lau aiaiuli
Sao faalalelei
Aue ua le ole lea
Ae paga lea
Talofa e i fanau ua tagi mai i ala
Pueia I faamai o le lalolagi soaasaoa ma le saua
O fialaau faasaina ma aga le pulea
Ua tuulafoai I le ala ma fai mai ua sau le tulafono
Aue
Pe ua e tuulafoai aisea
Pe ua tuu e a lau aiaiuli malomaloa?
E sui faiga ae tumau faavae
E le faatulafonoina lou alofa faamatua
Lou fulufululele ma lau aiaiuli ia leotele
O le alofa faamatua e lei se fesili
Ae po'o ai a tuulafoai I ai?
O oe o le moli o le aoa
Ao po-po ao pea lava pea
E le faasino ma le alofa
E te sula ma le toa aua ua ese nei aso
Opopo mai lona mu'amu'a i lou fatafata
O le tofi mai le Alii
O oe le matuamoepo
Ua le 'ole lea
Sao faalalelei.
Tiususu.

Nina Kirifi-Alai (2004)¹

¹ This poem was sent to me by the Samoan author, Nina Kirifi-Alai, who in reading drafts of this thesis was moved to write how the emerging themes of the thesis and the notion of Matuamoepo spoke to her. I am indebted to her for her kind and generous gift. Faafetai.
This work would not have been possible nor completed without the contribution and support of a great number of people. I wish to thank everyone who assisted me in my journey throughout this work.

To the Samoan youth offenders and their families who gave so much to this study I am deeply indebted to you all. You have each provided me with a window of understanding into this area that would not have otherwise been available.

To the CYFS social workers; the Police youth aid officers; the Youth court youth advocates; and the community intervention programme workers who gave of their precious time, my heartfelt thanks to you all. Your commitment to our young people is invaluable.

There were many key informants that helped to enrich this work, both in Samoa and New Zealand. I thank you all for your time and willingness to share with me.

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Undertaking this work has been as much a personal journey as an academic one. My knowledge and appreciation of the faaSamoan has improved considerably during the course of this work. There are many people that have contributed to this in profound ways. In particular to: Le Afioga Tuiatua Tupua Tamasee Taisi Efi and his good lady Filifilia Tamasee, my sincere thanks. To Masinalupe Tusipa Masinalupe, Tuli Fepuleai, Alalatoa Tafamaseefa Breda Tipi Fuatai, Malepeai Ieti Lima, Fuimaono Ioana, Bernadette Pereira, Seuseu Fata Faapito, Feagai Ropeti Ng Shiu, Levao Tiavaasu’e, Tafasilafa’i Lavasii, Tutogi Soi To’o, Seiuli Vaifou Temese and Tuifaasisina Senetima Kirifu – faafetai.

I also thank Fuatamalesa Pili Tago, who diligently translated my information sheets and consent forms; Anna Paris who edited the first draft of this work; and Pat Pe’a Lafaele and my parents (Leauanae Makiasi and Makerita Suaalii) for reviewing the Samoan language text in this thesis.
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Faafetai.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXPLANATION OF SAMOAN TITLE: Le Matuamoepo..............................................ii
ABSTRACT...........................................................................................................iii
DEDICATION.........................................................................................................v
FAAFETAI / ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....................................................................vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS..........................................................................................viii
LIST OF TABLES...................................................................................................xi
LIST OF FIGURES................................................................................................xii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION...........................................................................1
SAMOAN YOUTH OFFENDERS, NEW ZEALAND YOUTH JUSTICE AND SPIRITS
OF GOVERNING....................................................................................................1
  Spirits of Governing............................................................................................4
  Governmentality..................................................................................................12
  The New Zealand Youth Justice System..............................................................20
    Philosophical shifts in New Zealand youth justice...........................................20
    The institutional structure of the current system.............................................26
  Samoan Youth Offending, New Zealand Youth Justice and Spirits of Governing ...31

Chapter Outlines..................................................................................................32

CHAPTER TWO......................................................................................................36
METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK......................................................................36
  Introduction.........................................................................................................36
  Locating myself as researcher.............................................................................37
  Finding a research focus......................................................................................40
  Starting the Research........................................................................................43
    The ‘Population’ Group - ‘Youth Offenders’..................................................44
      Youth offender population size....................................................................44
      Type of offences.............................................................................................47
  The Case Studies................................................................................................50
    Selecting the Cases..........................................................................................51
    The Youth Offenders.......................................................................................52
      Jane................................................................................................................55
      Kelvin............................................................................................................58
      Koby...............................................................................................................61
      Snug..............................................................................................................63
      Jack...............................................................................................................66
      Weyouth.......................................................................................................69
      Spock.........................................................................................................71

Key Informant Interviews....................................................................................74
Fieldwork process................................................................................................77
  Research Questions............................................................................................79
Unpacking the spirit of faaSamoa in South Auckland-based Samoan youth justice cases

Theme 1: Aiga – Immediate Family Settings and Kin Networks
- Aiga as Family
- Aiga, Nuu and the Collective Identity
- Aiga and the Faamatal
- Aiga as a Gerontocracy
- Participant Experiences and Articulations of Aiga

Theme 2: Faaaloalo – ‘to respect, honour and serve (unselfishly)’
- Faaaloalo and Tautua
- Faaaloalo and Alofa
- Participant Experiences and Articulations of Faaaloalo

Theme 3: Usita ‘i – ‘to Obey’
- Good/Bad Samoan Conduct: Amio Leaga, Amio Lelei and Amio Faatamäali
- Participant Experiences and Articulations of Usita ‘i

Theme 4: FaaKerisiano – ‘Church and Christianity’
- Participant Experiences and Articulations of Ola FaaKerisiano

Spirit of faaSamoa as governmentality

Conclusion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Number of apprehensions of under-17 year olds by ethnicity, 1990-1999</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Number of proved cases involving young offenders by ethnicity, 1990-1999</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Number and percentage of 10-16 year olds attending youth justice FGCs, by ethnicity, 1995-1999</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Number and percentage of apprehensions of under-17 year olds by ethnicity and offence type, 1997</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Case-Studies Sample Breakdown</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>List of Key Informant Interviews</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Tiatia and Foliaki’s Measures of a Culturally Competent Organisation</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The NCNZ &quot;Process towards Achieving Cultural Safety in Nursing and Midwifery Practice&quot; Model</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Location of Samoan Self/Individual within Family, Village, Church &amp; Nation</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Fanaafi's Socio-metric wheel of the <em>Faamatai</em></td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Model of the relationship between the individual, family and state services as promoted by the principles of neo-liberalism</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The spirits of governing, key governing sites and key players in a Samoan youth justice case</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>