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LE MATUAMOEOPO:

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

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EXPLANATION OF SAMOAN TITLE: *Le Matuamoepo*

The Samoan title 'Le-Matuamoepo'¹ is a Samoan metaphor that describes the ultimate portrayal of motherly love towards her young. In this metaphor the image of a mother pigeon² 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'³.

¹ I am indebted to Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi for offering this metaphor and its explanation.

² The pigeon is also used in the oft-quoted Samoan saying – "*O tama a manufelelei 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 constitutive 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.

ABSTRACT

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 *faaSamoa*. 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.

DEDICATION

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 fulufulele
E oteote ma sagolegole
E opopo I le saogalemu o lona fatafata
O oe o le moli o le ava
E emoemo faasinoala pea i lona olaga
Ao po- po ao pea lava pea
O oe o le sula toga ua malomaloa lau ai aiuli
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 saosaoa ma le sauua
O fualaau faasaina ma aga le pulea
Ua tuulafoai I le ala ma fai mai ua sauua le tulafono
Aue
Pe ua e tuulafoai aisea
Pe ua tuu e a lau ai aiuli malomaloa?
E sui faiga ae tumau faavae
E le faatulafonoina lou alofa faamatua
Lou fulufulele ma lau ai aiuli ia leotele
O le alofa faamatua e leai se fesili
Ae po'o ai a tuulafoai I ai?
O oe o le moli o le ava
Ao po-po ao pea lava pea
E te 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)⁴

⁴ 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*.

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Undertaking this work has been as much a personal journey as an academic one. My knowledge and appreciation of the *faaSamoa* 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 Tamasese Taisi Efi and his good lady Filifilia Tamasese, my sincere thanks. To Masinalupe Tusipa Masinalupe, Tuli Fepuleai, Alalatoa Tafuamaseafa 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 Kirifi – *faafetai*.

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Faafetai.

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