

DISENTANGLING

Conflict Discourse in Pacific Societies

Edited by

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Stanford University Press 1990
Stanford, California

Doing Things with Words: Conflict, Understanding, and Change in a Samoan *Fono*

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That a concrete passing of judgment in a legal question is no theoretical statement but an instance of 'doing things with words' is almost too obvious to bear mentioning. In a certain sense the correct interpretation of a law is presupposed in its application. To that extent one can say that each application of a law goes beyond the mere understanding of its legal sense and fashions a new reality (Gadamer 1981:126).

IN THEIR introduction to *Dangerous Words: Language and Politics in the Pacific*, Myers and Brenneis (1984) provide a rich and stimulating discussion of the complex relationship between political speech and social order. Without retracting to an idealist, neo-Kantian view of speech as "creating the world," Myers and Brenneis point to the importance of the pragmatic, multifunctional use of talk for a culturally adequate understanding of social processes. In this perspective, political meetings must be seen not merely as the ritualistic and inescapable reproduction of predefined power relationships, but as contexts that "provide for public understanding, both of specific events and of more general assumptions about the social world" (Myers and Brenneis 1984:28).

In this essay, I will discuss these processes of interpretation and social action through a study of conflict resolution in a Western Samoan social event called *fono*. I will show that Mead's (1937) analysis of Samoan society as both hierarchical and cooperative is largely correct and that the organization of talk in a social event such as the *fono* provides the participants with the necessary tools

for reconciliation (see also Holmes 1987). In such a context, which shares some of the liminal qualities attributed by Turner (1974) to social dramas, the system is reassessed, the social order redefined, and change is made possible. In this context, not only do participants need to cooperate, they may also put aside rank and personal prestige in the name of a resolution that could "work."

Social Structure and Interaction: Stratification, Competitiveness, and Cooperation

In the course of his crusade against the "myth" of Margaret Mead and everything she represented in American anthropology and history, Derek Freeman has portrayed Samoans as people who are naturally prone to conflict and constantly driven by an incurable competitiveness. Thus, for instance, he wrote:

Situations are generated at all levels of the social structure in which, as we have seen, the omnipresent competitiveness is liable to break through the constraints of convention into open contention and conflict. . . . the rank-conscious Samoans become so deeply involved in contests that there is an ever present likelihood that participants in ritualized competition will resort to outright violence against their opponents. (Freeman 1983:142, 146)

Although Freeman is right to say that Samoans are very rank-conscious and, on some occasions, more prone to violence than one would expect from Mead's portrait, his case is overstated. Not only does Freeman not give the reader a sense of the theatrical nature of many threats and confrontations in Samoan everyday life (cf. Ochs 1988), but he seems so preoccupied with corroborating his point with details that he leaves out of the account some relevant information. For one thing, he forgets to tell us that Samoans do have institutions that deal with conflict resolution and that those institutions are, in some cases, very effective. In fact, as I will show in this study, when we look at some of the contexts for dealing with conflict in Samoan society, we find that Mead's criticized claim that Samoan society is both hierarchical and cooperative is, at least in some respects, right (cf. Gerber 1985).

Although perhaps strong in explaining history, Freeman is certainly weak in considering context (cf. Shore 1983; Weiner 1983). Thus, for instance, he clearly misses the typically context-bound nature of rank in Samoan society. The contextualization of rank, as we shall see, is important for assessing the relationship between ritualized competition and social order.

Hierarchy and Cooperative Achievement

There is no question that Western Samoa is a hierarchical or stratified society (cf. Keesing and Keesing 1956; Mead 1937; Sahlins 1958). Rank plays an important role in Samoan social organization and in daily social interaction, as it did historically in Hawai'i. Thus, a very basic distinction is made in Samoa between *matai* 'titled people' and *taulele'a* 'untitled people'. A *matai* title is conferred on an adult member of an extended family by a special session of the extended kin group (*'aaiga potopoto*). A title gives its holder control over one or more plots of land and its products and decision power and responsibilities within both the family and the village political structure. Thus, for instance, a *matai* title gives a person the right and duty to sit in the village *fono*. Among *matai*, a distinction is made between *ali'i* 'chiefs', and *tulaafale* 'orators' (what Mead called "talking chiefs"). Chiefs are typically, but not always (cf. Shore 1982), higher ranking than orators, who are seen as their vassals. An orator performs certain tasks for his chief and in return receives goods and protection. Untitled people are servants of *matai* and help in carrying out the provision of food and any kind of labor. Serving the higher-ranking *matai* is seen by Samoans as a crucial aspect of the traditional path to knowledge and power. Finally, rank and status differences are clearly indexed by the Samoan language, which has a special "respect vocabulary" (*'upu fa'aaloalo*) for talking about *matai*, their actions, feelings, and belongings (cf. Milner 1961).

The Samoan notion of rank, however, is extremely context-sensitive. As pointed out by Mead,

[rank] is a not an attribute of the individual himself, but it is always observed as an aspect of the situation in which an individual

is temporarily or sometimes permanently placed. . . . the Samoans recognize status [read "rank"] in any situation. The lover who calls on a girl is treated by the father of the girl, who may far exceed him in rank as a chiefly visitor. In any group of untitled young girls, one will be treated as the *taupou* ["village virgin queen"]; in a traveling party in which no one has rank, some will be designated to act as talking chiefs, etc. (Mead 1937:286).

Mead's characterization is confirmed by a number of more recent studies. Thus, Ochs (1982) has shown that, in household interaction, caregiving is hierarchically organized so that the highest-ranking caregiver does not have to actively perform for the baby, but delegates someone else who is lower ranking to perform for her. This general pattern is applied to any given situation so that there always is a high-ranking caregiver and a low-ranking one, with the lower being the active one. If the grandmother and the mother are present, the mother might be the active caregiver; if the chief of the family and the grandmother are present, the latter will be the active one; if no adults are present, between two siblings, the younger one will be the active one.

In most cases, it is the situation that dictates the roles to be filled. Thus, in a ceremonial exchange, if no untitled people are available to carry goods or serve a guest, another *matai* will perform the task, acting as an untitled person. This sensitivity to context is sometimes carried to the extreme of having a high chief serve a lower-rank orator if no one else is there to perform a given task required by the situation or if no one else is thought capable of doing it. Rank alone does not explain how things get done. Both rank and skill must be taken into consideration, together with the situational needs. Very often in Samoa, there is a greater emphasis on "getting things done" than on who should do it.¹ As pointed out by Mead, Samoans are often more interested in the performance itself than in the individual actors.

This separation between the individual and his role is exceedingly important in the understanding of Samoan society. The whole conception is of a ground plan which has come down from ancestral times, a ground plan which is explicit in titles and remembered phrases, and which has a firm base in the land of the villages and districts. *The individual is important only in terms of*

the position which he occupies in this universal scheme—of himself he is nothing. Their eyes are always on the play, never on the players, while each individual's task is to fit his role (Mead 1937:286 emphasis mine).

Whether we examine first the organization of a household cooking group or the organization of a village fishing expedition, we find the same principle exemplified, a number of individuals arranged in a hierarchical order, who contribute differentially according to their rank age, sex, and skill, to a total result, in which the whole group share, either directly—as in eating the food from the family oven—or indirectly—as members of a household or village whose prestige has been enhanced by the result of the labor which all have expended (ibid.:288).

The hierarchical but cooperative organization of interaction goes together with an ideology and a practice of task accomplishment as a cooperative endeavor (cf. Duranti and Ochs 1986). This point can be illustrated by the important role in Samoan interaction of the *taapua'i* 'supporter, sympathizer'. In the Samoan view, accomplishments are cooperative endeavors and the joint products of both performers and supporters. More specifically, for Samoans something is an accomplishment because of and through the recognition that others are willing to give it. The relationship between a performer and a supporter is reciprocal. The supporter recognizes the work that went into the performer's act of, for example, building a house, singing a song, fixing a broken tool, or driving a car. The performer similarly recognizes the work that went into the supporter's recognition of the performance. This reciprocal relationship is symbolically and routinely instantiated through *maaloo* 'well done!' exchanges. Should the performer receive a prize or compensation of some kind for his performance, he will have to share it with his supporters.

In this study, I will suggest that conflict management in the *fono* should also be seen as a cooperative endeavor that provides for public understanding and creates the context for change.

Ethnographic Background and Data

The data for this study were collected during one year (1978–79) in the village of Falefaa on the island of Upolu, Western Samoa.

Falefaa, which is located about eighteen miles from the capital of Apia, has a population of one thousand two hundred people divided into four sub-villages. Some one hundred Falefaa adults over the age of thirty years hold *matai* titles awarded to them by members of their extended families (*'aaiga poto poto*). Although in principle women can also be *matai*, very few women have been given the title, and only once did I observe a titled woman (an orator) participate in a *fono*.

Villagers live in traditional Samoan houses (*fale*) with no walls, or in Western-style wooden houses. Often houses are grouped together in a family compound typically consisting of a house in which people sit during the day and sleep at night, a cooking house, and an outhouse. Family compounds include one or more nuclear families related by blood or marriage.

Untitled people do most of the hard work involved in gardening (taro, bananas, breadfruit, and coconuts are the main crops), food preparation, and household maintenance. In the daytime, if not at a regular job in Apia or engaged in village or family affairs, titled men spend most of their time chatting with other *matai* in small groups, perhaps drinking kava or playing cards. A few go fishing or hunting, or work on their plantations with their young untitled relatives.

Seven important *fono* over a continuous period of four months (January–April 1979) form the basis for this study. I observed and tape-recorded these *fono*, and native Samoan speakers at Falefaa transcribed the tapes. The transcriptions were checked by me and supplemented with interviews of participants in each *fono*, especially those who had given speeches. Informal conversation and ceremonial speeches in non-*fono* contexts were also recorded for comparative purposes, and several informal interviews were conducted with chiefs and orators from the village to provide insights and evaluations of events from a Samoan perspective.

The Fono

There are several kinds of institutions in Samoan society that deal with breaches of social norms and could be discussed as contexts for disentangling. The word *fono* is often used to refer to a number of those institutions as well as to the actual events

where people try to settle disputes or punish those who have committed a crime (cf. Duranti 1981a; Freeman 1978; Larkin 1971; Mead 1930; Shore 1982). In this study, I will limit my discussion to one particular kind of *fono*, namely, the special convocation of the entire body of titled people (*matai*)—chiefs and orators—in the village. Such an assembly usually deals with political and judicial matters involving one or more local *matai*. As typical of traditional societies (cf. Comaroff and Roberts 1981), the same structure, namely, the *fono*, acts both as a high court and as a legislative body, which can make, ratify, and abrogate laws or discuss the policy to adopt with respect to a new problem or potential conflict.

In Falefaa, *fono* take place irregularly, depending on the needs of community leaders to solve or avoid a crisis. Gathering in one rectangular house, participants seat themselves according to rank. Higher-ranking chiefs sit on either of the two shorter sides (called *tala*) of the building, and other chiefs and orators align themselves in rows on the longer sides. The seating arrangement reflects verbal interaction during the *fono* because those who sit along what is considered to be the “front” part of the house (cf. Duranti 1981a) are usually the ones who do most of the talking. The high chiefs sitting along the *tala* are expected to speak toward the end of the meeting, after the other speakers have presented their positions. A kava ceremony opens the *fono*. Several behavioral norms are followed by participants during a *fono*. For example, everyone sits cross-legged on mats, and sustained eye-contact between the speaker and audience is avoided during a speech (but see Duranti 1981b for exceptions).

Two genres of speech are used in a *fono*: *laauga* ‘formal, ritual speech’ (stressing shared values and information, predictable in form and content, and emphasizing common interest, agreement, and harmony) and *talanoaga* ‘talk, chat, discussion’ (stressing personal values and new information, less predictable in interactional style, and emphasizing personal interests, disagreements, and conflict). Elsewhere (Duranti 1981a, 1981b, 1983, 1984a) I have detailed the characteristics of both genres. Briefly, the first speech in a *fono* is always a *laauga* considered as the introduction (*tuuvaoga*), delivered by an orator who will go on to announce the agenda but cannot yet discuss the issue(s) before the *fono*.

The opening orator's speech first recognizes the work of those who provided the kava, then makes a "thanksgiving to God." Then the orator's speech goes on to refer to one or more important events in Samoan history through the metaphor of "mornings" (*taeao*) of the past, after which the orator acknowledges the dignity or sanctity of the chiefs and issues a formal greeting and praise to all the important titles of the village, one by one. The agenda is then announced, with the orator ending his speech by metaphorically referring to the wish for "clear skies," that is, for good health for the participants.

Several *laauga* speeches by other high-ranking persons may follow, using a similar format. The *fono* then moves into a phase of *talanoaga* speeches in which issues are discussed and opinions expressed. Lower-ranking titled men may participate in this phase, which sometimes approximates conversational interaction in structure (e.g., turn-taking patterns) and style.

Samoans have several expressions that succinctly characterize the way they see a *fono*. The verb *teuteu* 'make beautiful, decorate', is used in a number of metaphors such as *teuteu le tagi* 'settle the court case' (cf. Milner 1966), *teuteu le nu'u* 'make the village beautiful, settle the conflicts within the village', and *teuteu le vaa* 'take care of a relationship'. These definitions are provided both as glosses for outsiders, such as the ethnographer (cf. Duranti 1981a:29), and as reflexive statements within a *fono*, as shown below:

(1) (*Fono* April 7, 1979).²

CHAIRMAN

(...) *fa'auma lea makaa'upu.*
Keukeu lo kaakou vaa ma Lufilufi.

... Let's close this topic.
(Let us) take care of our relationship with (the village of) Lufilufi.

Ia 'a 'e kaakou alo i luma.

So that we can face ahead.

(2) (*Fono* April 16, 1979).

MANUOO

(...) *Ia fa'akasi mai le Akua*
i le koofaa ma le ukaga ...

may God be with us (to help)
with the chiefs' decision and the
orators' decision

'o aa mea 'o fa'alekogu o le ikuumaloo, . . .	are there any problems in the district, . . .
'o le aso legei e keukeu ai mea uma. . . .	on this day everything will be settled.
'O e aa fo'i se koofaa i le kaakou (kau)aofiaga, . . .	whatever decision is going to be taken at our meeting, . . .
Ia 'o le kaakou malae aa legei e folafola ai mea uma . . .	Well, at this sacred meeting place everything will be announced . . .

As in dispute resolution in many societies, metaphor plays an important part in *fono* discourse. The word *teuteu*—pronounced *keukeu* in the phonological register used in a *fono* (cf. Duranti and Ochs 1986)—is used in expressions such as *teuteu le vao*. *Vao* is the high grass and weeds that grow in front of the houses (Milner 1966:313) and must be cut every so often by the young untitled men. Although *teuteu le vao* implies the action of cutting the grass, it conveys more than the simple act of cutting. It also implies a series of operations that must be accomplished in order to make the land look nice: collect the fallen leaves, cut the grass, and burn it. *Teuteu* is a reduplicated form of the word *teu*, which means, as a noun, “a bouquet of cut flowers” and, as a verb, “to put something in order” (cf. Shore 1977:161).

In Duranti (1981a:30), I gave the following interpretation of the Samoan metaphor: that a *fono* is called either when a breach of some social norm has taken place or when one is anticipated. Such a breach, either actual or potential, creates a crisis in which the harmony of village life is disrupted. “The ideal mutual love (*fealofani*) of the members of the community is suspended. The beautiful village becomes like the *vao*, the bush or forest, where tall grass and weeds grow, where men can misbehave away from the eyes of social institutions and social control. The convocation of a special session of the *fono* is the attempt to make life orderly and more predictable, to cut the weeds, the bad feelings, and to make the village beautiful again.” When I wrote this, I was intrigued by the correspondence between the Samoan ideology of a *fono* and its discourse organization, but I did not pursue the analysis of the actual process of conflict resolution. In this study I will discuss the *fono* as an antagonistic framework that provides a

context not only for testing the social system, as suggested by Shore (1982), but also for allowing communication to take place where otherwise no communication would be possible (Myers and Brenneis 1984). It is in fact in the process of accusing, shaming, blaming, as well as discussing possible solutions to a particular conflict, that Samoans work out other conflicts and therefore create a context for expressing and understanding more than what is being explicitly discussed. The outcome of a *fono* is a cooperative achievement, a dialogical construction of a temporary mutual consent that goes beyond the participants' individual goals and "fashions a new reality" (to use Gadamer's words in the quote above). In the process of "straightening up" a relationship, the *matai* reconsider the social order presupposed by that relationship. By defining "truth" and restoring "justice," the *matai* cooperatively define the meaning of their actions and shape their own future.

The Power of Words: Cooperative Construction of Truth and Search for Justice

Samoan ways of speaking exhibit many striking examples of an ideology and practice of interpretation in which words are not simply seen as representing some already defined world, but as shaping reality, as creating the world. There is nothing idealistic about this view, however. There is no "spirit" or conscience being objectified into the world through language.³ There is instead a materialistic view of "words as deeds," of utterances as "acts" (cf. Austin 1962). The same verb *fai* means both "say" and "do, make"; the word *uiga* means both "meaning" and "actions" (cf. Duranti 1984b, 1988). This world view seems in fact common to many Pacific languages (cf. Lindstrom, this volume; Rosaldo 1982; Verscheuren 1983).

If words are deeds, they can be powerful and dangerous at the same time. If words shape the world, a speaker may be responsible for the consequences of what he said, regardless of his putative original intentions. Samoan orators must thus be very careful about what they say. Although a speechmaker can gain in prestige and wealth from speaking on behalf of a powerful chief or from helping out in a difficult negotiation, he may also risk retaliation

for having said what might be *later* defined as the wrong thing (cf. Duranti 1984b, 1988).

These risks conflict with the stated goals of a *fono* as an arena for the reconstruction of truth and search for justice (see example 1 in the appendix). Social actors in a *fono* use different strategies to deal with this problem.

Announcing the Agenda: Recognition of the Crisis

As mentioned above, one of the first speaker's tasks in a *fono* is to announce the agenda of the meeting (cf. Duranti 1981a, 1981b). Consistent with the local theory of speech and social action briefly outlined above, the announcement of the topics to be discussed is more than the official definition of a crisis or of a crime; it is also its public constitution. Prior to the first speaker's announcement, the events to be discussed might have been a private affair, they might have had no publicly accessible interpretation. Once mentioned, they become subject to public concern. In the Samoan view, if I understand it correctly, the crime or crisis is in part constituted at the time of its announcement in front of the assembly. Given the highly stratified nature of Samoan society, if the people to be tried are higher ranking than the person who must announce the agenda of the meeting, the latter finds himself in a difficult spot. He might have to publicly accuse parties who are more powerful than he is.

One way to get out of this difficult situation is to skip the announcement of the agenda and let other, more powerful members of the assembly deal with it. Another strategy is that of being very vague and using disclaimers as to the real nature or seriousness of the conflict or crime to be discussed. (Indirect discourse is characteristic of disentangling events in several societies represented in this volume, e.g., see essays by Arno, Brenneis, McKellin, Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo, White). Finally, a third strategy is that of two or more members of the council to cooperatively work at stating the agenda so that responsibility may be diffused (see example 2 in the appendix).

Cooperative construction of an accusation, however, is not only invoked by lower-ranking *matai*, but by higher-ranking ones as well. There are times in a *fono* when even the most powerful and

outspoken figures may need to borrow a voice to express disappointment. When feelings run high and it becomes increasingly difficult for an individual to "keep cool," others may come in to fill in his role or change the atmosphere with highly formal and ritual speech. The organization of interaction in a *fono*, in which one party speaks at a time and can hold the floor for an extended period of time,⁴ facilitates this cooperative work at reconstructing events and assigning responsibilities. In this way, multiple resources are available for otherwise inescapable and dangerous one-to-one confrontations.

Resolution

The canonical discourse organization in a *fono* is to start with a formal and highly predictable speech that stresses the shared values and common history in the community and then to move to the more personal and unpredictable statements of the accusations and expressions of disagreement. Thus a *fono* always starts with a *laauga*, a ceremonial speech that celebrates the dignity of the participants as "gods on earth" and at the same time defines them as subject to God's ultimate will. The points of agreement among participants are also stressed, such as their will to get together and arrive at a decision that would satisfy both the chiefs and the orators. Only after the shared goals and background have been stressed do speakers get into the details of the crisis. This very same pattern is also maintained in the discussion part of the meeting, *talanoaga* 'chat, discussion', in which each speech also tends to embed the more controversial or accusatory statements within outer layers of predications about harmony, shared understanding, and wishful thinking (cf. Duranti 1981b, 1984a). The discourse organization adopted by Samoan speech-makers in disentangling contexts such as the *fono* mirrors the "old-new strategy" often discussed by psychologists and linguists interested in preferred word-order patterns across languages (cf. Clark and Haviland 1977; Chafe 1976; Givon 1979).

When Things Must Be Said:
Shaming and the Liminal Nature of a *Fono*

Regardless of the particular topic being discussed, an apology to the assembly or at least to some of its members is an important outcome of any *fono* that discusses direct or potential breaches of social norms. For this reason, one might think of the entire process of disentangling as a series of moves toward reconciliation, with the apology being one of the last steps (similar to the *ho'oponopono* process described by Boggs and Chun, this volume).

Such a process may be a long and difficult one. Events and responsibilities must be assessed to avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Thus, those making the accusation must be given a chance to state their case and display their feelings. The defenders, in turn, must show concern for the honor of the offended and the prestige of the whole community. Not only the accusation but also the apology must sound convincing. Thus, despite the explicit emphasis on reestablishing the lost harmony, as discussed above, attempts at quick resolutions of a case may be discouraged or explicitly condemned (see example 3 in appendix). Public, often prolonged, shaming may take place even when the accused is a high-ranking chief. The excerpt in (3) below, for instance, is taken from a meeting in which the high chief A. and his orator V. are being accused of having used offensive language toward the assembly during the day of the elections for the National Parliament. The senior orator who acts as the chairman of the assembly engages in a prolonged shaming invective in which the sacred honor of the village and of the chiefs is contrasted with the secular mischiefs of one of its members. In addition to rhetorical questions such as, "Is that the role of you chiefs?", we also find threats that might provoke fear in the defendants as well as in anyone else tempted to follow his steps. The phrase, "the tradition of Moamoa," for instance, refers to the old practice of expelling the offenders from the village and burning their houses and belongings.

(3) (Fono March 17, 1979)

SENIOR ORATOR

(...) 'O le gu'u legei e le se
fasi-gu'u

Pe se gu'u e ka'alo i ai se isi.

Mai le foafoaga o le lalolagi,
'O Falefaa 'o le gu'u (...)

e fagagau aku ai kupu o le
akugu'u.

(...)

'Ae 'aafai fo'i 'o Lau Afioga A.
[name],

'ola! Se 'ou ke ofo.

'Ou ke ofo gaa—a e pei
oga 'ou kaukala aku,

Kalu mai le foafoaga o legei gu'u,

ma lo'u fo'i ola mai i le lalolagi legei

'ou ke le'i fa'alogo aa i se isi

u- aga faga faga mea leaga
le pa'ia o 'Aaiga.

(...)

Ma le aofia laa legei ma le foga

e fikoikogu i Lau Afioga A.

go'o le aso le paaloka.

Le aso ga ma- maakagoofie.

'Ua ula lea aso.

'A 'e 'ua koa pogaa o lou afio aku

i le mea ga iai lo kaakou gu'u akoo

(...) This is not a piece of a
village.

Or a village to fool around with.

From the creation of the Earth,
Falefaa is a village (...)

(where) the kings of the country
are born.

And if it was Your Highness A.
[name]

Man, if I am surprised!

I am surprised—as I already
said

From the beginning of this village,

and in my life on this world,

I never heard anyone

who said those bad things to
the holy chiefs.

And this assembly and fono

is about Your Highness A.

cause the day of the elections.

That beau- beautiful day.

That day had been joyful.

But it was spoiled by your arrival

to the place where our entire
village was

<i>ma 'upu 'ua lafo aku i lo kaakoou gu'u.</i>	and (by) the words said to our village. ⁵
<i>'O le mea laa o le aofia ma le fono.</i>	This is the thing (= topic) of the assembly and the fono.
<i>'O lea 'o lo'o fia maua gei le sa'o.</i>	Here (we) will know what really happen.
<i>po 'o Lau Afi-[CHANGE OF TAPE] (...)</i>	whether it was Your High(ness...)
<i>'O le mea laa lea 'o lo'o fia maua i le asoo o le kaakou gu'u.</i>	This is what today's meeting of our village is for.
<i>Auaa 'o 'upu ia 'ua lafo i le gu'u. . . .</i>	Because of those words said to the village. . . .
<i>'O aga o Moamoa e kaakau 'o iai. (...)</i>	The tradition of Moamoa must be applied. (= a severe punishment)
<i>A'e kaumafa i le pia, faga mea leaga aku lea.</i>	You drink beer, say then bad things.
<i>Faga mea leaga aku lea. Oka!</i>	Say bad things. Man!
<i>E fa'apegaa ea se kulaga o 'oukou 'Aaiga,</i>	Is that the role of you chiefs?
<i>'O 'oukou 'Aaiga e ka'i ala?</i>	You are the chiefs who (should) show us the way?
<i>'I mea lelei ma mea maakagofie?</i>	Toward good and beautiful things?
OTHER SPEAKER <i>Maalie!</i>	Well said!

This is indeed harsh rhetoric, and physical violence might have erupted had these words been uttered in another context. Within the *fono*, instead, even senior, high-ranking participants seem willing to accept shaming and threats as part of the disentangling process. Their cooperation is indeed called upon not simply by

mentioning honor and moral values, but, more importantly, by the threat to the system of authority they represent. Shaming is allowed if credibility must be restored. In these contexts, details are strategically brought into the discussion. Thus, speakers might engage in verbatim quotes of verbal offenses or incriminating statements if the defendants seem reluctant to recognize the seriousness of their crime. An example of this is given in (4) below:

(4) (Cont. from (3) above)

SENIOR ORATOR

(...) *Go'u kaukala aku fo'i i
legaa aso*

go 'ua 'ee afio aku i le fale.

"A. [name], *ka'akia e iai se
kaeao.*"

Oi! A'o lou koe afio mai i fafo

koe afo gei 'upu 'o gaa

"*'Ai kae! Ufa! Kefe!*"
(...)

I also spoke on that day

when you had come to the house.

"A. stop, there is some important
affair (going on)."

Oh! But you came back outside

(you) repeated those words

"Fuck off! Ass! Prick!"

Although it is my understanding that the senior orator is relying on his authority and special role in the proceedings to be able to repeat such offensive words in front of the assembly, no one is in principle immune from blame and shame. Thus even a powerful *matai* can in fact be criticized by a lower-ranking orator. The following excerpt, which presents such a case, also illustrates the more indirect, metaphorical style often found in the speech of less powerful members of the assembly.

(5) (Fono April 7, 1979)

TAFILI

*'Ua gaepu le vai oga 'o le maka
o le vai*

The water is muddy because the
cause of this (lit. the eye of the
water)

<i>'o Lau Koofaa le Makua.</i>	is Your Highness the senior orator.
<i>Le afioga ga kauave. 'O fea 'o iai?</i>	The opinion had been given. Where was it?
<i>Leai. 'Ua leaga oga o ai?</i> <i>Leai. 'Ua mama lava</i>	No. It's bad because of whom: No. It did leak
<i>oga 'o Lau Koofaa le Makua.</i>	because of Your Highness the senior orator.
<i>'O le ala fo'i lea 'o le fa'aumiumi o legei makaa'upu.</i>	That's the very reason of the prolonging of this matter.

Within the characteristically stratified Samoan society, this almost egalitarian, liminal nature of the *fono* points to a concern for the construction and preservation of a policy that is meaningful to more than a few powerful figures.

The political discourse within a *fono* can be viewed as operating at different levels. The very convocation of a *fono* can be seen as an astute stratagem invented by some influential party to gain allies and be granted public permission to prosecute and publicly shame those who dared challenge his authority or conspired against him. Rather than explicitly saying "so-and-so betrayed me" or "I want to punish him," a *matai* might try to build a case against his political opponent or someone related to him. His motive might indeed be retaliation or a vote of confidence from the assembly. He may indeed be driven by competitiveness or by his obsession with rank, as Freeman (1983) might argue (see above). However, once the *fono* has been convened and others are involved, the cooperative construction of truth and mutual consent might lead toward a direction unwanted by those who called the meeting. In the process of striving for power and recognition, the *matai* not only work out a solution for the issue at hand, they also provide each other an occasion for the public understanding of other viewpoints and seeing of alternative solutions. It is within such a context that change becomes possible.

A Context for Change

One of the main themes of the meetings I documented during my first stay (1978–79) had to do with the elections for the national parliament. Before the elections, several meetings of the village council centered on the issue of who should run for the election. Despite the recognized need to narrow down the selection to one candidate, three people from the village (Falefaa)—the two senior orators (Moe'ono and Iuli) and the young chief Savea Sione—ended up competing against one another and against the other candidates from another village in the same district.⁶ After the defeat of Falefaa's candidates and the victory of the incumbent M.P. from the nearby village of Lufilufi, other meetings took place with several different agendas. As can be gathered from the transcripts of those meetings, however, the elections remained one of the main themes in the speeches. The defeat had weakened village unity and the relationship with the nearby village of Lufilufi. The "mutual love" was shaken. The subsequent *fono* were used for disentangling the controversial outcome of the election. One of the issues was seniority. There seemed to be some resentment from some members of the assembly against the young chief Savea, who had dared to compete against more senior *matai* and had actually received more votes than the two more senior candidates from his village. The issue, in fact, was of a more general nature and involved the relationship between "tradition" (*aganu'u*) and modern government laws (*tulaafono*). According to "tradition," senior *matai* have precedence over younger, lower-ranking ones; according to the "law," any *matai* has the right to seek election.

Things got even worse when Savea decided to take to court the district M.P. for slander. Many *matai* felt that a public confrontation in the capital's court would have reopened the wounds created by the elections and would have worsened the already shaky relationship with the M.P.'s village, Lufilufi, historically and hierarchically tied to Falefaa.

A meeting was immediately called to try to convince Savea to withdraw his accusation. Savea promised to think about it and give an answer in a few days. Given the danger, for the whole

community, that his decision might entail, Savea found himself (or was this planned on his part?) in the advantageous position of being able to offer something to those very people who would have wanted to punish him for his lack of respect. The meetings in which Savea is asked to withdraw his accusation toward the M.P. represented potentially highly confrontative situations, where several powerful figures were struggling to regain control of the events while trying to strike against their political opponents.

What we see through an analysis of the transcripts is quite remarkable: Savea chooses this occasion to apologize publicly for having previously challenged the senior orators' authority (see example 4 in the appendix). Furthermore, from the very beginning, he hints that he wants to do something that would please one of his antagonists, the senior orator Moe'ono, who has asked him not to go to court with the M.P. (see example 5 in the appendix). Confronted with Savea's public recognition of his authority and seniority, Moe'ono radically changes attitude and repeatedly recognizes, in front of the assembly, Savea's wisdom:

(6) (Fono April 7, 1979)

MOE'ONO

Ia. Fa'afekai Savea.

So. Thank [you] Savea.

*'O lea laa 'ua maua aku lou
figagalo . . .*

Now that your decision has been
given . . .

fa'apegaa Savea

(let's do) like that Savea,

*Ia. Ikiki lou kigo makua
le koofaa!*

So. You are young but think like
a wise person! (lit. Your body is
small but your decision is ma-
ture!)

?

Maalie!

Well said!

Whatever the original goal of the participants, the discussion is turned into an occasion for healing old wounds. One party (Savea) finally acknowledges the right of seniority, while the

other party (Moe'ono) recognizes the younger chief as an equal. Harsh feelings and disagreement come under control by a common goal: the social harmony within the village and within the district. The different threads of discourse come together for a solution that would work.

After such a turning point, the participants as well as the ethnographer might have forgotten the different issues and conflicts being addressed by the assembly on that day. After all, harmony seemed both the goal and the result. The final speech by the highest-ranking chief, however, puts things into perspective again.

Summing Up: The Chiefs' Perspective

The *multifunctional* nature of the discussion is often recognized in the speech of the highest chief (*ali'i*) present, who speaks as a representative of the entire chiefly "side" or "families" (*'aaiga*). The high chief summarizes the previous discussion, commenting on the different opinions and interpreting the conflict as embedded in a wider context. What was indirectly indexed by the case officially on the agenda is often more explicitly mentioned in the high chief's speech. This is recognized by Samoans themselves who often say that whereas an orator goes "around and around" an issue, a chief talks "straight." The chief's understanding of the conflict embodies at times the recognition of alternative positions. Such a recognition is already, in some cases, the acceptance of a potential change in the political alliances or power relationships within the council.

(7) (Fono April 7, 1979)

SALANOA

[...] *e kaua fo'i iaa ke a'u*
le vagaga a Moe'ogo

... Moe'ono's speech is also
important for me

... *e kusa* ... *'o laga*
fa'amalamalamaga auaa ...

... as for ... his explanation
because ...

'o legei mea o le paloka,
'o le mea
o le- o le mea fa'alekulaafogo

this thing of the election, it's
something
that has to do with the (new)

... e:- e:-e

e lee feaiaaka'i laa
le kulaafogo ma le agagu'u.

pei laa ou ke kau maua aku i
le figagalo o Moe'ogo,

'ese le kulaafogo. 'Ese le-
le kaakou vaa ma Lufilufi.

[...]

'o le kuulaga laa o le- o la'u aa-

'o lo'u aa magaku ko'akasi, ...

ma 'o lou alofa mogi fo'i lea.
Alofa iaa Savea,

Pe alofa i le gu'u ...

e iai lo'u kaofi fa'aapegei=
pei oga 'ou fa'akuu aku

e'ese le kulaafogo 'ese le
agagu'u.

'Afai gei ... e- e maaloo Savea, ...

i le moliaga o Igu, ... Ia.
Maaloo Savea. ...

Ae 'o le 'aa aafaiga lo
kaakou vaa ma Lufilufi.
[...]

Ia. Afai fo'i e- ... 'o le
'aa faiaiga Savea, ...

Ia e fa'aapea oga kaakou—
kaakou afaaiga.
[...]

... lafo iaa Savea e

laws ... is ...

(you) cannot compare the (new)
laws with (our) tradition

as I have gathered from Moe'ono's
opinion,

One thing is the (new) laws.
Another thing our relationship
with Lufilufi.

that's the position that I-

my own opinion, ...

and my true love, my love to
Savea.

If (you) love the village ...

here is my opinion as I
mentioned before

One thing is the (new) laws,
one thing the tradition.

Even if ... Savea wins

in the court case with Inu. ...
Okay. Savea wins.

But it will affect our
relationship with Lufilufi.

Then, if by any chance, Savea
loses, ...

We are also going to be
affected/hurt.

.. leave to Savea to reconsider

<i>feku'uga'i ai laga koofaa, . . .</i>	his decision, . . .
<i>Ia amai lekali po 'o lea le kali la'a aumaia,</i>	So give us an answer and whatever the answer (we)'ll get.
<i>Ia. Kaakoa fiafia!</i>	Let us be happy (anyway)!
<i>Maguia le aso!</i>	Have a good day!
OTHERS	
<i>Maaloo!</i>	Well done!

The public acceptance of Savea's decision, whichever will be—"whatever your answer, let's be happy about it!"—is in fact a recognition of his new higher position. Although such a recognition is found at first only at the level of *political discourse*, it is eventually corroborated by the following events: at the next elections Savea was elected as the district M.P. representative.

Conclusion

Whether or not the actors' initial motivation in provoking a crisis or getting involved in a crime is the "competitiveness" described by Freeman (1983) as "omnipresent" in Samoan characters, Samoans do have institutions that provide alternatives to the "outright violence against their opponents" that Freeman (1983:146) says is the likely outcome of almost any kind of social interaction in Samoan society. Whether or not Samoans are *really* aggressive and competitive, the *fono* is at least one efficient framework that allows them to conduct their daily life without continually resorting to physical violence.

A question that still remains open and should be given attention is the extent to which similar frameworks work for other sectors of the population such as, for example, untitled and young people. Furthermore, we must also consider the possibility of variation from one community to another—even within the same island—in terms of efficiency and availability of the institutions. A culture provides the frames, but it is real individuals who must perform the tasks. During my fieldwork experience, I was impressed by the ability of certain people to hold the village polity

together. I imagine there could be other situations where this might not happen. When we talk about social dramas, we often forget that the unpredictability of their outcomes is related to their fluid structure, which changes while we observe it, and it is often too distant before we can describe it. The careful analysis of transcripts of audio-recorded interactions may provide a useful avenue to the reconstruction of those swift moments when the ethnographers' path and that of the people they study cross, while history and personal choice merge and the future gets shaped, through words, among other things.

Notes

Acknowledgments. I would like to thank Karen Watson-Gegeo for her comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper. For their friendship and patience in dealing with my intrusive presence in their daily affairs, I am particularly grateful to the chiefs and orators in Falefaa, Western Samoa, where I conducted my field work in 1978-79 and in 1981. (*Ia, fa'afetai atu i 'Aaiga ma Aloali'i fa'apea fo'i i laa'ua Matua ma le 'a'ai o Fonotii.*) Special thanks go to the Rev. Fa'atau'oloa Mauala and his wife Sau'iluma for their constant support throughout our stay in Samoa. The research on which this paper is based was funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF Grant No. 53-482-2480).

1. This cultural preference is also reflected in the syntactic structure of Samoan utterances that tend to prefer clauses with the structure Predicate-Patient (VO) over Predicate-Agent (VA) (cf. Duranti 1981a; Duranti and Ochs 1983; Ochs 1988).

2. *Transcription conventions:* I have used traditional Samoan orthography with the exception of vowel length, which is here transcribed phonemically, that is, with two identical vowels instead of a macron on a single vowel. The letter g (ng in some other Polynesian orthographies) stands for a velar nasal and the inverted apostrophe (') for a glottal stop. The transcripts were first done by local native speakers and then revised by the author in cooperation with a number of knowledgeable Samoan speechmakers. All the examples in this paper are taken from audio-recording of spontaneous (non-elicited) interaction (cf. Duranti 1981a for more information on methodology). Three dots "... " indicate an untimed pause. Three dots between parentheses "(...)" mean that a portion of the transcript has been omitted for brevity or clarity.

3. See Schaff (1973) for a review of the philosophical, psychologi-

cal, and linguistic literature on linguistic relativity and linguistic determinism.

4. In Duranti (1981a), I proposed to use the term "macro-turn" for extended turns that also comprise backchannel responses at fairly predictable moments.

5. Here "our village" means "our council," namely, the *matai*.

6. It might seem strange that each person was able to maintain his decision to run for election against the assembly's opinion. In fact, within highly stratified Samoan society, an individual's decision *must* be respected. A person's house might be burned down by the council's orders, but he cannot be forced to change his mind about something. Ultimately, no *matai* can tell another *matai* what to think or what to say, unless the latter voluntarily agrees. A Samoan saying expresses this attitude succinctly: *e le umu le isi matai i le isi matai* 'no matai prepares the oven for another matai'. Each *matai*, whether chief or orator, whether high ranking or low ranking, is ultimately sovereign over his own decision.

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Appendix

Further examples from *fono* verbal interaction referred to in the discussion.

(1) In search of truth and justice (*Fono* March 17)

IULI

(...) *E saa'ili aa po 'o ai ua faia fa'a'upuga gei.*

(We must) find out who said those words.

... *Auaa aa lee faia,*

... because if (this) is not done,

e koe kula'i mai fo'i se isi kaimi.

it will happen again some other time.

?

Maaliel

Well said!

(...)

IULI

Saa'ili le mea kogu. ...

search for the truth. ...

'Oga fai lea 'o le figagalo o le
kaakou gu'u.
(...)

So that we can fulfill the village
wish.

(2) Setting the topic (*Fono* April 7, 1979)

(Context: The first orator has just concluded the introductory speech
leaving out the mention of the agenda.)

FIRST ORATOR

(Ending his speech) *Maguia le aofia* Good luck to the assembly
ma le fogo! and the fonol

?

() *kai // fekalai.*

thank you // (for your honorable)
speech.

CHAIRMAN

'O aa *makaa'upu o le fogo?*
Fai mai makaa'upu // o le fogo.

What are the topics of the fonol
Tell us the topics // of the fonol.

FIRST ORATOR

'O le *makaa'upu*
o le aofia ma le fogo, ... Ia e
fa'akakau kogu lava
i lo kaakou Falelua ... oga pau ga
'o makaa'upu.

The topic
of the assembly and the fonol ...
really centers around
the two subvillages [fn. 3] ...
That's it for the topics.

CHAIRMAN

Oi! [Conventional marker of repair Oh!
initiation]

FIRST ORATOR

(Softly) *E aa?*

What?

CHAIRMAN

(Softly) 'O le *isi makaa'upu o Savea.* The other topic about Savea.

FIRST ORATOR

Ia. 'o le isi fo'i makaa'upu e uiga

Right. There is also another topic

i le- . . .

le Afioa iaa Savea 'ogo 'o - 'o le laa:- . . .

mea fo'i ma Fa'amakuaaigu.

Go 'ua kukulu Savea i- . . .

i le Maaloo . . .

Ia (iga) 'ua ka'ua gi fa'akosiga

(a) Fa'amakuaa'igu i le paloka, . . .

iai fo'i gisi makaa'upu o lo'o lee maua . . .

Ia. La'a maua i luma.

?

Maaloo!

CHAIRMAN

Ia. Fa'afekai aku [name] . . .

'ua 'ee fa'amaga le fono

. . .

about . . .

His Highness Savea 'cause- the:-

thing there with Fa'amatuaainu.

Cause Savea has complained . . .

to the government . . .

Given that some (illegal) campaigning has been said (to have been done)

by Fa'amakuaa'ino during the elections

(if) there are some other topics (I) didn't get . . .

So, they will be brought to the floor.

Well done!

So. Thank you [name] . . .

for starting the fono

(3) The apology must be motivated (*Fono* March 17, 1979)

CHIEF

Lau susuga saa 'ee kolaulauiga makaa'upu.

Ia. e lee gofogofovale fo'i e

kakau oga-

auaa e iloa e igei 'o igei e kupu ai le fa'alavelave.

'O lea laa 'ou ke kalosaga aku ai ma le fa'amaulalo.

. . . E leai se kagaka e sa'ogoa i legei lalolagi

'afai 'o iai se sesee, ia,

lafo mai i le koe'iga ma pau lava

'o le mea akooa.

Your Highness, you have announced the agenda.

So. Not to keep sitting here for no use it is necessary to-

because this one (= me) knows that it was this one (= me) who started the trouble.

So now I apologize (to you) with all humility.

. . . Nobody is perfect in this world

if there is some error, well,

Charge it to this old man and that's the end of the thing.

*Ia. E lee mafai e seisi oga
kofo legei lalolagi. . . .*

*'O le mea laa lea gao ga 'ou
kalosaga aku,
i luma o lo kaakou gu'u*

*ia e lee aogaa fo'i ga gofogofo
fa'akali umi
fa'akali umi ia. A'o lea e iai le mea.*

*Ia. Ga 'o ga avaku o le
fa'amaulaloga.*

*Po 'o lea loukou figagalo, ia.
Ga'o ga avaku (pea ia) e lee umi aa
gi a'u kala.
E pupu'u. . . . Kaukala sa'o.*

?

Mo'i lava.

?

Maaloo.

CHIEF A.

Ia 'ua uma fo'i

IULI

(Interrupting by calling A's name)

A! A! Fa'afekai saugoa i Lau

Afioga.

*Ia. Sau se ikulaa oga e saugoa
mai lea,*

*Ae se'i- . . . 'o lea e le'i uma kaakou
foiala*

*pei oga iai fo'i kuulaga ma aofia o
lo kaakou gu'u.*

*Ia. 'O lau kali aku lea. I lau-
saugogo a lau afioga.*

(Second orator restarts his speech)

Well. Nobody can test this world. . . .

That's the thing I apologize to you
about,
(truck passes by) (. . .) in front
of our village

it is not worth it also to keep
sitting waiting forever
(pulling out money) waiting
forever. So. Here is the thing
(=money).

So. Here is the apology to you.

Whatever your wish is, well,
Only give you (like) my speech is
not that long.

It's short. . . . (to) talk straight.

Very true.

Well done.

So it's also finished

Thank you for you speech, Your
Highness.

Well. There will be a time when
you will say that,
But let- . . . our subvillages have
not finished (speaking)
as there are also other positions
of our village.

So. That's my answer. To your-
speaking of Your Highness.

ALO

Ia. 'O lea mapu ia i le maoka le
kagoa (...)

So. It now rests in his residence
the holy speech (...)

(4) Savea recognizes his mistake (Fono April 7, 1979)

SAVEA

'Ae 'ou ke fa'apea aku Moe'ogo ...
[...]
e aogaa lo'u ... kapukapua'i aku
i lalua alofaiva ...

But I am telling you Moe'ono ...

my support for the campaigning
of you two [Senior Orators] is im-
portant ... [lit. 'my support for
your fishing is useful']

(Later on, same transcript, p. 65)

[...] Moe'ogo ma Iuli e aogaa
la'u- la'u- la'u
alu aku i le mea o lua ... maliu ai
ma lua- ... fagogoka ai. ...

Moe'ono and Iuli, my- my- my-

going with you two is needed ...
(wherever) you go and fish ...

(5) Aiming for social harmony (Fono April 7, 1979)

SAVEA

'ou ke kalosaga Moe'ogo
'ua fusia lo kaakou gu'u i le
fealofagi i le asoo
ia aveavea'i le vaaega a 'o le 'upu
mogi
o le aso sefulu-, koe sefulu aso
ia amaia le Aso Gafua iaa ke a'u
'ou ke avaku le kali
'ae mo'omia ke le mea
'ua 'ee siligia ai lo'u kagaka.

I implore you Moe'ono
to strengthen our village in the
mutual love on this day
to continue in the way of the truth

for another ten days
give me until Monday
I'll give the answer
but it is most important (to me)
the thing you have asked me.