# Traditional Samoan Expressions about Fishing and Weather and their Similarities to Other Pacific Islands



The Samoa archipelago is similar to the many islands of the Pacific. It continues to adapt, evolve and at times struggle to maintain its traditional cultural values and customs. The wisdom and knowledge of faasamoa (the Samoan way) are embedded in its language, such as the common savings and proverhial expressions. Below are some of the many traditional Samoan expressions about fishing and their connections to other Pacific Islands.



# Fish Distribution in Samoa and Tokelau

## Samoa



Above: Fagasa villagers capture atule using coconut leaves1

# FISHING

"E le sili le ta'i, na i lo le tapua'i." Praying for successful completion of a feat is far more

raditionally, atule (bigeve scad) were often caught in Samoa using the communal effort of lau (driving fish towards a trap with branches of coconut leaves). As the lau s pulled (ta'i, tata'i) by villagers to trap the atule on shore, illage chiefs and elderly members prayed for the successful

Today, a number of villages in Samoa such as Ofu of Manu'a, Fagasa and Leone of Tutuila and Pu'apu'a of Savaii continue to catch atule using the lau.

After capturing the atule, the tradition is to distribute the atch equally to all the village families who participated in the fishing. When the catch is large, they are also given as gifts to family and friends in other villages.

Gifts of fish are part of the reciprocal relations and constant circulation of food and aifts that maintains amoan social structure to this day. Atule are considered a blessing and a gift from God. Thus, villagers of Fagasa and

# Tokelau



"Awaiting the fish at tafega" refers to a Tokelau phrase known as "tali tafega." Tali means to wait for the passage of fish schools with a net. Tafega refers to natural passages used by fish as they move from lagoon to the reef or from the open sea to the lagoon across the reef with shifting and changing tides. There is an old belief (still acted on today) that thunder during a month is a signal for the tafega



Photo Left: In Tokelau, inati is the division and distribution of netted fish. Above: Children waiting

In Tokelau, after the fish are captured at tafeaa, they are listributed equally to families and munity friends, which is similar o the distribution of the atule in amoa. This island practice of distribution highlights communal iving and the close network

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- 3. Elders from Atafu Atoll, 2012. Echoes at Fishermen's Rock: Traditional Tokelau fishina. Edited and translated by A Hooper and
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## Fishing Methods in Samoa, Fiji and Hawai'i

Many stories tell of Samoa's connection with other Pacific islands. These stories are what Samoan people carry with them throughout generations and hold on to the values they teach.

One of Samoa's proverbial sayings "O faiva o Fiti ia lililo" (Let the Fijian method of fishing remain a secret) is still used today. Its hidden meaning is to not reveal a certain matter, such as the commission of an injustice. The story behind the saving is described as such:

The Tuifiti (King of Fiji) had two wives, one a Fijian, the other a Samoan. Each had born him a son. One day the boys went fishing for their father. The Fijian used a bow and arrow; the other fished with a spear like the Samoans. The Fijian met with failure, but the Samoan who used the spear caught many. They decided that the Fijian method of fishing, being so unsatisfactory, should no longer be taught to others. In Samoa, in fact, fishing with bow and arrow has hardly ever been popular; today it has completely fallen into disuse.

However, many islanders continue to fish using spears. It has been reported that Samoa fishermen use the long, thick, heavy Samoan spear during the day and the lighter three-pronged Hawaiian spear at night with a flashlight when the fish are less active



## Red Mullet in Samoa and Fiji

Pacific Islanders are connected in various ways, and fishing, which has always been a part of the Pacific, is one of them. Samoan tradition says that Sina (a red-lipped mullet from Fiji and that the family of Toala in Puapua Savai'i has the right to pule (rule) over the fishing arrangements for her muller

In Tutuila, the red-lipped mullet appeared only at the Western end. They appeared first at Lauanae and then moved westward to Amanave near the light house island. Here they were caught in nets stretched across the channel between the small island and the coast

When fishing for anae (mullet) the fishermen post themselves around the big net. As the fish take to flight by jumping out of the net, they are caught in alagamea (small hand nets). This method of fishing is

Samoan custom requires that a fisherman who has caught many fish to give a few to his neighbor who has not caught any. This is called valelei (to keep up

# Eel in Samoa, Whale in New Zealand

"Ua a pusi, a Pagoa" is a Samoan proverbial fishing expression Its translation is "Some were destroyed by eels, other by Pagoa." The origin, meaning and interpretation come from this story

The inhabitants of the old village Papa (near Satupaitea, Savai'i) once noticed a big school of fish out in the sea. Thinking they were bonitos, they hurried to the shore, embarked in their canoes and went out. However, the fish were not bonitos but aitu (spirits) in the form of big sea eels. The eels rushed the people and started to devour them. A few men managed to return to the shore. However another aitu named Pagog was lurking there and ate un those who had escaped the eels. Thus many people perished. Then, the saying states, "Ua malaja nisi ja pusi, malaja nisi ja Pagoa," This savina is used as words of caution to people to be careful of what may be

The Maoris of New Zealand have a similar proverb. "Those who avoid the sea-god will be killed by those on shore." The Maori proverbial saving comes from an old story about a man named Tinirau, who was an ancestor of all the fish, and the priest named Kae, whom his people called Te Aitanga-a-Te Poporokewa (the descendants of Poporokewa, a type of whale).

The story of Tinirau and Kae begins with the difficult birth of Tinirau's wife Hineteiwaiwa. Following the birth, Tinirau needed to find a priest to conduct the baptism. He traveled to Te Tihi-o-Manono, where he secured the services of Kae. They returned to Tinirau's island. Te Motutapu-o-Tinirau, where the ceremony was performed. Afterwards, Tinirau summoned his pet whale Tutunui and cut off a piece of flesh, which he gave to Kae as navment. Tinirau also offered Kae a waka (canoe) to travel home in, but Kae asked if he could ride home instead on the whale's back. Tinirau reluctantly agreed, giving explicit instructions that when they neared the shore and the



Despite these instructions, Kae drove Tutunui towards the shore and beached him. The whale was cut up and cooked in the village ovens. The aroma of the flesh

was brought by the winds to

Tinirau's home. Learning of the creature's fate, Hineteiwaiwa convened a group of women, including Raukatauri, goddess of flute music, to travel to Kae's home and capture him. Unsure what Kae looked like, the women were advised to make the villagers laugh, for they would be able to identify Kae by his niho taviki, a tooth that has arown over the top of another.

When the women arrived at Kae's village, the people were gathered for the evening's entertainments. Kae assumed his customary place nearest the door. The women danced and told stories, but they could not get Kae to laugh. It was not until their dances became more erotic that they finally succeeded in spotting the tooth and confirmed Kae's identity. The women removed him from the house and placed him on a waka, taking him while he slent to Tinirau's island and into a house identical to his own. When Kae finally awoke, he wondered why Tinirau was sitting in his house. Tinirau killed Kae and avenged Tutunui's slaughter. Thus, the proverhial expression, "Those who avoid the sea-god will be killed by those on shore." Even though Kae tried to avoid what he did to Tutunui (the whale), he ended with the same fate that he had committed,

# WEATHER

## Samoan Traditional Knowledge about Weather

The general understanding of the Samoan people about their environment is evident in the names of their surroundings. For example, the Samoan term for wind blowing from the northern direction is called the To'elau wind in reference to the island of Tokelau, which is located north of Samoa. The wind blowing from the southern direction is called the Matagi Toga or Toga wind referring to the island of Tonga, which is located south of Samoa. The naming of wind directions in reference to other Pacific islands' geographical sites indicates navigational tactics of Samoan ancestry

To study hurricanes and typhoons, scientists fly aircraft into storms to measure wind velocities and directions, the location and size of the eye, the pressures within the storms, and their thermal structure. Meteorologists also use radar, sea-based recording devices and weather satellites. On the hand, Samoans traditionally forecast their weather by observing changes in the behavior of animals and the environment to predict weather.

- · Cockroaches fly or crawl around the house in the evening = rain will fall in a very short time and
- \* The top branch of a yam plant falls and points towards the soil = strong winds will arrive within two days.
- · Atafa (lesser frigatebird) are seen flying towards and taking refuge on land = a cyclone or strong winds will hit the islands soon.
- The eves of a cat are shaped like a quarter of a moon = the tide is low.
- The eyes of a cat are round = the tide is high

These natural indicators of the weather verify the Samoan beliefs that link them to their environment.

### Proverbial Expressions

### "A lele le Toloa, e toe ma'au lava i le vai."

Wherever the Toloa bird may travel, it will always return and settle back to its native waters,

This expression is often metaphorically interpreted to mean that, wherever the Samoa people may travel, they should never forget their homeland and shall return and settle back in Samoa. The expression also explains the significance of direction and avoiding being lost, as we are always guided back to where we belong. That same sense of direction applies to Samoan's spiritual connection to their environment. Wherever they may be, the Samoa people stay connected to their cultural values and traditions as made available by their ancestors through oral traditions such as common savings and proverbial expressions.

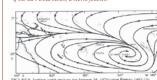
## "O le ua na afua mai Manu'a."

This expression originated from the story about the king of Manu'a, Tuimanu'a, and his two daughters named Sina and Aolele. When the Tuimanu'a was away visiting his friend the king of Tonga for some months, his daughter Aolele took a Savaii chief named Lemanunu for a husband and moved to Savaii. The king was quite mad when he returned. It was highly improper for a princess to elope like his daughter had done. He ordered the other daughter Sina to go to Savaii and fetch Aolele. Death for her and Lemanunu was the alternative. Aolele loved her husband dearly but knew her father would keep his word. So she returned to Manu'a, but her parting pledge to Lemanunu was that she would never ston loving him. And every time it rains in Savaii, that would mean she is crying for him from her home in Manu'a. Those showers are her tears



This proverb reflects the fact that the prevailing winds in Samoa are from the east; therefore, it will rain first in Manu'a before other parts of Samoa. Rain is typically interpreted as good luck.

# If the La'i wind blows, a storm follows



A Samoan tulafale (talking chief) may use this proverbial expression to convey a warning message to the rest of his family about future protocols and the consequences of these protocols if the warning is disobeyed. Therefore, the la'i wind is used in a figurative speech to signify the effect of a certain situation, whereby a storm is the consequence.

The la'i is defined as westerly winds blowing southwest through west to northwest with varying forces. If strong it brings rain and heavy squalls.3 According to this proverbial expression, the la'i wind is seen as an omen for "had weather" and thus forecasts the arrival of a storm.

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