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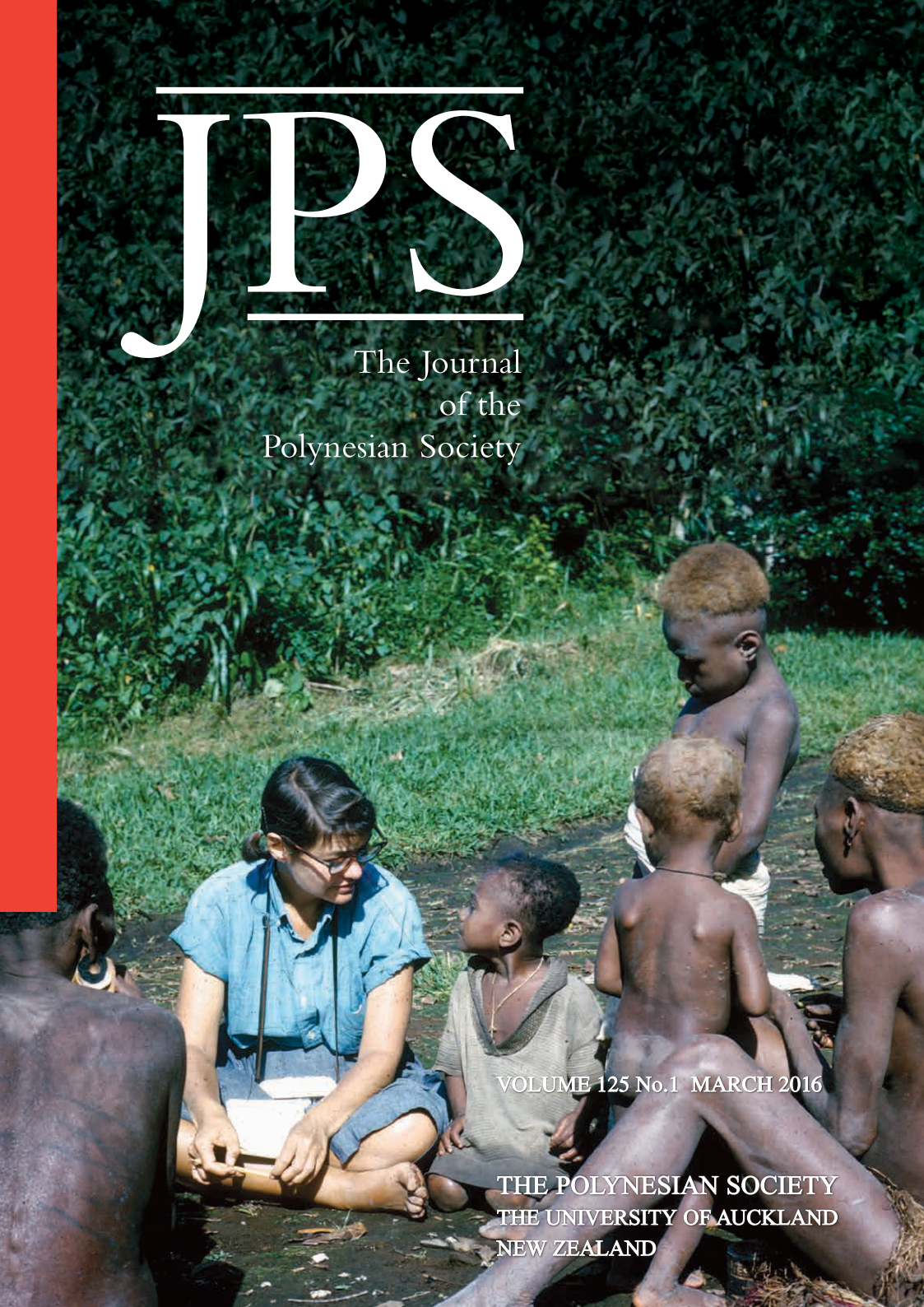

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LĀ'EI SĀMOA: FROM PUBLIC SERVANTS' UNIFORM TO NATIONAL ATTIRE?

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This is a free country

> It has finally happened. The Prime Minister and his Prado [*sic:* Prada] boys and girls are dictating our way of life. Fancy telling us what we should wear to state functions! Excuse me, this is not North Korea. This is Sāmoa, the land of the free, and un-oppressed. And why should we all turn up to state functions like clones?... Why on earth would I want to look like the Prime Minister and his cabinet?... Come on, people, this is a free country. Wear what you want, be who you are. And don't let anyone tell you what you should wear, especially if you are not a Head of Department—those poor geezers have to do as they are told. (Letter from "Valentino Chanel Versace" to *Samoa Observer*, 7 March 2003: 7)

In March 2003, when I went back to Sāmoa after an absence of 14 months, everyone including my research informants, friends and Sāmoan family members, told me about the new dress code introduced by the Independent State of Samoa government. Later it was explained to me that the new dress code was officially called "*Lā'ei Sāmoa*", *lā'ei* being the polite word in Sāmoan for clothing. Although defining *Lā'ei Sāmoa* is not straight-forward, as will become apparent, the key components have been the use of a specially designed logo and fabric printed with *tapa* 'bark-cloth' style patterns for men's shirts and women's tops and skirts.

During my earlier visit to Sāmoa, I had conducted research on female tailors and their jobs, so I gradually developed an interest in Sāmoan practices related to daily attire and their relationship to the *fa'a-Sāmoa* 'Sāmoan way or custom'. Among those practices, I was especially curious about dress codes and interested in how they were established in Sāmoa, were understood in the *fa'a-Sāmoa* and were differentiated by gender and why. I knew that various dress codes were evident in ordinary Sāmoan life, and that while some of them had long-lasting significance, others had proven to be merely temporary. Although the introduction of a new dress code certainly fascinated me, I honestly thought it would prove to be nothing more than a passing fad. This, however, turned out to be far from the case. As exemplified by the opening quote, articles in the *Samoa Observer,* the most widely distributed newspaper in Sāmoa, expressed strong opposition to the introduction of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* as

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a public servants' uniform. Yet, over the year that followed *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* was gradually accepted into Sāmoan daily life, and by the next year, 2005, it had come to be viewed as the appropriate national attire of the Sāmoan people.

This article aims to consider what made it possible to change *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* from a simple dress code for public servants to a kind of national attire used in Sāmoan daily life. To address the ways *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* changed, I will trace the process through which *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* came to be viewed as the national dress and, simultaneously, one of the ways through which "Sāmoanness" was being reproduced in the era of globalisation. To this end, this article is composed of three parts: first, I will introduce how human geographers have discussed the conceptualisation of "place" in relation to globalisation, in order to consider how "Sāmoanness" was reproduced in this particular case; second, I will trace the series of changes related to *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* that took place from 2003 to 2005 based on my research in Sāmoa; and last, from the perspective of "Sāmoanness", I will discuss why *Lā‘ei Sāmoa*, which initially was nothing more than a public servants' uniform, came to be viewed as the national attire of the Sāmoan people.

PLACE AND GLOBALISATION IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

"Place" is an everyday word commonly meaning a specific area of geographic space. In human geography, however, place is a core concept. Why do people decorate their own room with their favourite things? Why was Tara, the fictional plantation in *Gone with the Wind*, so meaningful to Scarlett O'Hara? Why does a little-known town become so important to particular people? When we are seeking for the answers to these questions we are dealing with the conceptualisation of place. For human geographers, place is not only a portion of geographic space, but a "meaningful location" (Cresswell 2004: 7). On the one hand, place can provide a source for a people's identity, so that it is strongly related to a people's experiences and emotions. On the other hand, a place may be intentionally made unique and valuable, especially with the aim of enhancing economic benefits. At any rate, places include multifaceted phenomena, so that "what makes it a place" is both a complicated and compelling issue in human geography.

Since the 1990s, how places should be conceptualised has come to be more controversial in relation to globalisation. At first, many social scientists believed that globalisation would result in a homogenisation at the global level. Anywhere people went, and especially in cities, they would encounter the same things—international cultural products such as McDonald's, Starbucks, pop music and youth fashion, deriving mostly from the United States. Such situations were viewed as supporting the idea that globalisation made places less unique (Cresswell 2004: 54).

In contrast, two well-regarded geographers, David Harvey and Doreen Massey, have argued that places have always been constructed and that globalisation has simply further stimulated those processes, despite the perception of place differing significantly. David Harvey has pointed out that "place has achieved a certain kind of 'permanence' in the midst of the fluxes and flows of urban life", such that "[p]rotection of this permanence has become a political-economic project" (Harvey 1996: 293). He used such examples as the "gated community", "heritage" and "nationalism" to show how people have attempted to secure, revalue and recreate their own particular place in a dramatically changing world (Harvey 1996).

Though Doreen Massey shares the same basic view that places have always been constructed, she has called on us to re-conceptualise place not as inwardly closed but as outwardly open:

> Many of those who write about time-space compression emphasize the insecurity and unsettling impact of its effects, the feelings of vulnerability which it can produce. Some therefore go on from this to argue that, in the middle of all this flux, people desperately need a bit of peace and quiet—and that a strong sense of place, of locality, can form one kind of refuge from the hubbub. So the search after the 'real' meanings of places, the unearthing of heritages and so forth, is interpreted as being, in part, a response to desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of all the movement and change. A 'sense of place', of rootedness, can provide—in this form and on this interpretation—stability and a source of unproblematical identity. In that guise, however, place and the spatially local are then rejected by many progressive people as almost necessarily reactionary. They are interpreted as an evasion; as a retreat from the (actually unavoidable) dynamic and change of 'real life', which is what we must seize if we are to change things for the better. (Massey 1996 [1991]: 241)

Massey strongly argued that the re-conceptualisation of a place is necessary and recognises that: (i) places are not static but processes, (ii) places do not have to have boundaries in the sense of divisions which frame simple enclosures, (iii) clearly, places do not have single, unique "identities", but harbour internal conflicts, and (iv) the specificity of place is continually reproduced, but a specificity does not result from some long, internalised history, rather it arises because each place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations (Massey 1996 [1991]: 244-45). She called this new concept of place "a global sense of place".

In general, clothing plays an important role in reproducing "the specificity of place". Clothing is not merely one of the basic needs of human beings, it also is a visual expression of the culture of a place and therefore reflects the identities and norms of that place. In the Pacific, for instance, Addo

(2003: 142-48) argued that the current practices of the Tongans related to clothing were clearly associated with three key components in Tongan social interactions—respect, rank and duty. Moreover, even within the same country, how people clothe themselves usually differs by age and gender. Younger people, in general, are apt to take up what is "new", which often is the result of globalisation. Young women in particular are skilled at attaching value to "new" things introduced from overseas (Watson 1997), while at the same time, wrapping their bodies with ethnic dresses to sustain their ethnic and national identity under globalisation (Senda 2002: 133). Thus, people's clothing and codes of dress have significant meanings, and help sustain or reproduce the specificity of place.

CLOTHING AND IDENTITY IN SĀMOA

Generally speaking, Sāmoa is regarded as a South Pacific nation that has been particularly successful at preserving its customs and traditions. These are referred to as the *fa‘a-Sāmoa*, but this term does not simply indicate ethnic identity.

> *Fa‘a Samoa*, as the Samoans term their political and economic system, conveys a very deep meaning to Samoans: clear in essentials, flexible in detail. It was not (and is not) simply a reactionary nationalism…. Because the Samoans conceived of *fa‘a Samoa* as a framework for action based upon the social structure of the *‘aiga* [extended family] and the *nu‘u* [village] and the authority of *matai* [chief] and *fono* [council of chiefs], new practices, ideas and goods could be accepted and incorporated into it so that either the system remained unchanged in its essentials, or else was not perceived to have changed fundamentally. (Meleisea 1987: 16-17)

Meleisea asserted that *fa‘a-Sāmoa*, based on a distinctive chiefly system, is an indispensable concept for Sāmoan daily life, and what Sāmoans consider as *fa‘a-Sāmoa* depends on the context because the concept has a certain kind of flexibility. The accounts of *fa‘a-Sāmoa*, however, historically have been based on comparisons with other practices. On this point, Yamamoto (1997) has argued that *fa‘a-Sāmoa* practices have been defined in contrast to *fa‘a-Pālagi* (European ways). She further pointed out that *fa‘a-Sāmoa* was deemed superior in terms of moral and human relations, while *fa‘a-Pālagi* was superior in terms of material culture. She also noted that Sāmoans use the term "*fia Pālagi* (want to be a European/to act like a European)" to pejoratively describe those who rarely or reluctantly participate in ceremonial exchanges, which are very important for the Sāmoan chiefly system, and who prefers Western-style housing and imported goods, such as breads or soft drinks (Yamamoto 1997: 171-72).

Turning to the history of clothing in Sāmoa, the Sāmoan people in the pre-Christian period left their upper bodies completely uncovered. However, they had various ways of decorating their bodies: leaf girdles and dress mats, many ornaments and fragrances made of the natural resources, distinctive hair styles and tattooing. Their fashion in pre-Christian times visually marked their social status and gender, which were basic defining aspects of their stratified society (Krämer 1995: 317-65, Mageo 1994, Schoeffel 1999, Stair 1897: 113-21, Turner 1861: 202-9). In common with societies elsewhere in the Pacific, Sāmoan clothing has been dramatically transformed since 1830, when Sāmoans began to embrace Christianity. Many studies have shown that European clothing was adapted to reflect distinctive indigenous cultures, such that contemporary clothing and dress have elements that are seen as a continuation of pre-contact practices (e.g., Addo 2003, Mosko 2007, Tcherkézoff 2003).

It could be said that the clothing of Sāmoans, and Sāmoan dress practices, have been transformed through contact with European goods, especially in the colonial period. Western Sāmoa, which was administrated initially by Germany and later by New Zealand, had twice experienced independence movements (known as the *Mau*). Despite the absence of clear historical accounts, it can be argued that the wearing of *'ie lavalava* 'wrap-around skirts' expressed Sāmoan identity in the face of colonial powers. Photos of important persons in historical books, such as *The Making of Modern Samoa* (Meleisea 1987), typically show that most of them wore long-sleeved shirts with a tie and jacket, which was the style of a European gentleman in those days. However, a photo of the famous Savai'i orator Namulau'ulu Lauaki Mamoe, who was the leader of the unsuccessful *Mau* movement in 1909, shows him wrapped in a distinctive *'ie lavalava* made of *siapo* '*tapa* or bark cloth' with a *ulafala* 'necklace of red *Pandanus* keys'[1] (see Meleisea 1987: Plates 1, 2, 3 and 11). Again, in the second *Mau* movement in the 1930s, the Sāmoan supporters were identified by their uniform of a purple turban, a blue *'ie lavalava* with a single white stripe and a white singlet (Field 1991 [1984]: 109).

As a consequence of contact with the Europeans, a new group called *'afakasi* 'half-caste' appeared in Sāmoan society. In colonial times, most *'afakasi* were offspring of European fathers and Sāmoan mothers. In 1903 the German colonial administration made law changes which ultimately divided *'afakasi* into two groups. Those with European fathers, who also were the product of formal marriages, were referred to as "European mixed race" and were classified as resident aliens.[2] Other 'half-castes' were referred to as "Samoan mixed race" (Meleisea 1987: 162-65). One of the visible features of identity for European *'afakasi* was the wearing of European clothing.

According to Meleisea, those who failed to apply for resident alien status were jokingly termed "*o papālagi-‘afakasi ae lavalava ie* (European half-castes without shoes and trousers)" (Meleisea 1987: 165). In this way, it could be argued that the clothing of Sāmoans and Sāmoan dress practices have drawn upon the dichotomy of *fa‘a-Sāmoa* and *fa‘a-Pālagi*.

After Independence, however, what this dichotomy represented differed substantially by gender. Historically, European goods, including clothing, have played a significant role in representing male status in society (e.g., Thomas 2003). Even now, the wrapping of the body with European goods symbolises a special status in Sāmoan society. Based on his 1963–64 research in Sāmoa, David Pitt (1970) wrote: "An important part of the preference for European necessity goods is that they confer or reflect status, i.e. the consumer's social position, in relation to the European world, or in Sāmoan society itself", for example, trousers were "recognized by both Sāmoans and Europeans as essential symbols of European status" (Pitt 1970: 31). He further noted that "[C]ertain European goods are symbols of Sāmoan status, marking a separation from European society. For example, increasingly in recent years, the cloth *lava* (kilt) [*‘ie lavalava*], the small square attaché case, the Hong Kong umbrella, have become the sign of the male Sāmoan, especially when he comes into town" (Pitt 1970: 33).

In contrast, when Sāmoan women wrap their body with *‘ofu Pālagi* 'European clothing', their fashion is regarded as something that is contrary to *fa‘a-Sāmoa*. The elders often call girls who prefer to wear European-style clothing or pants "*fia Pālagi*", even though the kind of clothing that would be designated *‘ofu Pālagi* as opposed to *‘ofu Sāmoa* 'Sāmoan clothing' is unclear in practical terms (Kuramitsu 2005). Notably, most dress codes in contemporary Sāmoa could be said to target women, especially young girls. As is apparent in the conversation reproduced below, one dress restriction for girls is directed at the wearing *‘ofu vae* 'lit. clothed legs', referring to pants of any kind. These dress codes are enforced by the village chiefs, although the specific rules, the extent to which they are enforced and the penalties for violating those codes differ in each village. The following conversation, based on practices in a village located in the north part of Savai‘i, illustrates the foregoing:

> —You cannot wear *‘ofu vae* in the village, can you?
>
> *Matai* [chiefs] emphasise wearing *‘ie lavalava* because *‘ofu vae* is *‘ofu pālagi*. If you wear *‘ofu vae*, it means that you wear *‘ofu pālagi* and that causes the loss of our traditional way of life, the *fa‘a-Samoa*. You can wear *‘ofu vae* when you get on the bus. You can wear *‘ofu vae*, but you are not to be seen around the village. Boys can wear short pants or bermuda pants, but girls cannot wear short pants and tops when their brothers are around. It

> is a *feagaiga* [the relationship between sisters and brothers]. Sisters have to respect their brothers. So if they show their bare shoulders and breasts to the brothers, it is very rude.
>
> —But you do not need to do that in Apia, do you?
>
> No. Apia is different. It is a town where many people come from different villages and live. They can do whatever they want. But here in the village, the rules are emphasised by *matai*.
>
> —If somebody breaks the rules, what would happen?
>
> They are fined. They have to bring pigs, fine mats or money. If they don't have any pigs, they have to pay. If they break the rules many times, they will be banished from the village. (Male *matai* in his 40s, pers. comm., October 2001)

Even in Apia, which is characterised as a place where "you can do whatever you want", there are still certain dress codes for girls. The dress code for the library in the National University of Samoa, for instance, was officially approved by the Management Committee of the University in May 2000. The preamble explained the dress code as follows:

> The University Library is pleased to announce its dress code. This dress-code is based on our Samoan customs and stresses the importance of wearing appropriate attire that is both safe and acceptable in our institution of higher learning. An Institution which is committed to excellence and preservation of cultural values [*sic*].

Following this text, the clothes that were prohibited in the library were listed as follows:

> For all female students:
>
> Sport shorts or hot pants (very-short-type, above the knees) are not allowed at any time.
>
> Singlet, spaghetti-type tops and off-shoulder dresses are not allowed.
>
> Mini-skirts or mini-dresses are not allowed except for Executive suits or proper puletasi/pea.[3]
>
> No see-through dresses of any kind.
>
> For all male students:
>
> No singlets or tank-tops should be worn in the library except for shirts and t-shirts.

> No hot pants or sport shorts, except for bermudas and khaki shorts.
>
> Ie-solosolo/lavalava are to be worn below the knees and with a belt.

What is obvious is that the clothing forbidden for girls was more "Americanised", which was the attire young girls in particular preferred to wear when they were going out. In most cases, such clothing was perceived as *‘ofu Pālagi*.

THE INTRODUCTION OF *LĀ‘EI SĀMOA*

In March 2003, *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* (Fig. 1) was officially notified as a dress code for public servants. The first article on *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* in the *Samoa Observer*[4] was one in the "Cabinet News" section. It appeared on 21 February 2003 and read as follows:

> "National Attire for State Functions"
>
> Cabinet has approved the National costume, 'Laei Samoa', to be worn by both genders at State affairs. Outfits to be worn by both Males and Females will be made of 'Elei' [a fabric printed with Pacific island designs; see more below]. The Elei can be of any color and print design.
>
> The picture of a Teuila, Samoa's national flower [red ginger; *Alpinia* sp.], must be printed on the left hand side, the pocket side of the Men's shirts. This is the same for the Ladies' attire.
>
> Underneath the picture of the Teuila, the words [*sic*] 'Samoa' in small lettering is to be printed: When attending State Functions, Men will be expected to wear a suit comprising of jacket, shirt and tie, while the Ladies will be wearing the formal 'puletasi'.
>
> The Men's shirts should only have one pocket on the left hand side, with slits down the sides to allow for a proper fit. The solid color of the 'ie' [specifically *‘ie faitaga* 'a solid colour *lavalava* with pockets'] is the choice of the wearer so long as it coordinates with the shirt.
>
> The Ladies must however wear a Puletasi [two-piece garment] entirely printed with any elei design. Both Men's and Ladies' outfits must use buttons made from coconut shells.
>
> The approved 'Laei Samoa' dress code will come into effect on Saturday 1st March 2003. (*Samoa Observer,* 21 February 2003: 3)

According to the articles in the *Samoa Observer* published up to 3 March 2003, the original idea of *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* came from the Samoa Tourism Authority (STA). Initially public servants were expected to wear *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* only when they were attending state functions. On 5 March 2003, however,

the *Samoa Observer* reported in an article entitled "National uniform to be worn today" that Government networks had been circulating a memo demanding all employees to wear *Lā'ei Sāmoa* every Wednesday and Friday at their work places.

The intentions of the Cabinet regarding *Lā'ei Sāmoa* were not clearly stated. In an interview on *TV Samoa* on 21 February 2003, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi said that "the dress code was ideal for Samoa's warm climate" (*Samoa Observer,* 23 February 2003: 4), while Matafeo Reupena Matafeo, STA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), whom the *Samoa Observer* sarcastically called "the government-appointed national fashion authority", commented in an interview with a newspaper that *Lā'ei Sāmoa* "is essential to distinguish Sāmoans from other nationalities like Tongans and Fijians" (*Samoa Observer*, 5 March 2003: 5).

After the news of the introduction of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was released, severe and notably sarcastic criticism of such a sudden decision followed in the *Samoa Observer*, which had already "fielded letters complaining" (*Samoa Observer,* 5 March 2003: 5) on the first day it was implemented. Table 1 lists all articles on *Lā'ei Sāmoa* published in the *Samoa Observer* following its announcement; 13 out of 19 articles listed in Table 1 expressed dissatisfaction with the Government dress code.

Aside from general dissatisfaction about the way the Government had abruptly and arbitrarily decided to proclaim a uniform for public servants, the complaints stated in the *Samoa Observer* can be classified into two types. One set of complaints questioned the historical and cultural authenticity of

Figure 1. *Lā'ei Sāmoa*: as worn by male public servant, 2005 (left), and close-up of logo, 2003 (right) (photos by author).

Table 1. News and opinions on *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* in *Samoa Observer* newspaper, 2003.

No.	Date	Section	Title
1	21/02/2003	Cabinet news	National attire for State Functions
*2	23/02/2003	local news	Govt-imposed dress code criticised
*3	2/03/2003	viewpoint	The rise and fall of Ti leaf skirts: why?
*4	5/03/2003	local news	National uniform to be worn today
*5	6/03/2003	letter	What's with all this elei business?
*6	7/03/2003	letter	This is a free country
*7	8/03/2003	letters	Govt. dress code proposal opposed
*8	11/03/2003	letters	Neither free nor culturally correct
*9	12/03/2003	editorial	Why invest in better national manners instead?
*10	12/03/2003	letters	*Elei* where?
*11	22/03/2003	viewpoint	Dress code a nuisance and eyesore
*12	28/03/2003	letters	*Elei* and *fu‘afu‘a* leaves
*13	9/04/2003	local	PM addresses dress code
14	13/04/2003	editorial	Omnipotent government gets into our clothes, our mats, our pockets and our cars
15	15/04/2003	editorial	Omnipotent government gets into our clothes, our mats, our pockets and our cars (full-version)
16	24/04/2003	local	"Govt. dress" unacceptable for Parliament
*17	27/04/2003	letters	Parliament and government dress code
18	29/05/2003	frontpage	Ties, please, gentlemen
19	3/06/2003	frontpage	Elei, traditional wear get in Parliament door

Note: * denotes articles mostly opposed to *Lā‘ei Sāmoa*

the components that would be representing the national identity of Sāmoa. That questioning was based on the following three points. The first was the authenticity of the *teuila* (red ginger) flower symbol, with some asking whether it was appropriate for it to become the national emblem since it had initially been introduced in the 1990s as a symbol for a nation-wide cultural festival aimed at developing tourism. In response to this, Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi insisted that "it is essential that a country is recognised by a national emblem, [in] this case a flower", and added that "New Zealand has the fern, Canada the maple leaf, Sāmoa will be known by the Teuila" (*Samoa Observer,* 9 April 2003: 3). However, opponents raised a number of questions—was the *teuila* an indigenous plant in Sāmoa; were the *to'oto'o* 'orator's staff' and *tānoa* 'kava bowl', which had been used as if they were national emblems, really suitable for this purpose; and did the *teuila* flower have adequate historical and cultural significance to be a "Sāmoan tradition" (see entries No. 2, 3 and 13 in Table 1). Most of the critics seemed to believe that the *teuila* flower was not sufficiently unique to represent Sāmoa's national identity.

The second point pursued was the "traditional" clothing of Sāmoa. Two articles argued that if the Government wanted to make people wear the "clothing of Sāmoa", they should return to grass skirts made of *tī* leaves or to *siapo*. Another two articles insisted that the style of the first Prime Minister, Fiame Mata'afa, bare-chested with a black *'ie lavalava*, *siapo* belt and a *'ulafala*, was suitable for the national dress in terms of being "traditional", "most respectable" and "dignified" (see entries No. 3 and 8 in Table 1).

The last point related to *'ēlei* fabrics. Originally *'ēlei* meant 'decorating *siapo* with colour' by using matrices called *'upeti* made from coconut leaf ribs, coconut husk fibre or carved boards (Krämer 1995: 350). Today, *'ēlei* refers to fabrics that are decorated with patterns typically used on *siapo*, made by using a carved board.[5] When wearing *siapo* instead of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was suggested, the Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi explained that "[t]he siapo designs are being replicated on the elei uniform" (*Samoa Observer,* 9 April 2003: 3). In addition, one of the senior officers in the Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet explained to me: "The designs of *'ēlei* are those of *tapa* cloth. In the old days, the Sāmoans wore *tapa* cloth as *'ie lavalava*. Now modernisation enables people to print *tapa* cloth patterns on materials. The Cabinet chose *'ēlei* because it is Sāmoan natural *'ie lavalava*" (male officer in his 30s, pers. comm., August 2005). In this way, the connection between *tapa* cloth and *'ēlei* fabrics with their distinctive patterns made the latter the most appropriate material for fashioning *Lā'ei Sāmoa*, yet there were also questions about what was the Sāmoan *'ēlei*. One such question was expressed as follows:

> Have you noticed that over the last few nights on Televise Samoa News, most of the so-called elei prints worn by cabinet ministers are not Samoan elei? So what's with distinguishing us from the Tongans and Fijians? Take a look at the different government departments and you'll see Fijian, Hawaiian, Cook Island and other Pacific island designs which have no connection to Samoan elei. (*Samoa Observer*, 6 March 2003: 7)

Another writer remarked:

> One may say unequivocally that the dress code is now a nuisance and really an eyesore…. I wish to advise that you may carefully choose the best five real Samoan 'elei' patterns that you can find or create. (*Samoa Observer*, 22 March 2003: 6)

Other complaints about the *‘ēlei* fabrics concerned the cost of the clothing. Such complaints mainly came from public servants because they had to buy *‘ēlei* fabrics themselves and make a new uniform.[6]

> "Elei where?"—Letter from Elei fanatic
>
> Being an underpaid but obedient public servant, I have borrowed from my bank just so I could buy myself an elei uniform. Since I have some to spare from the loan, may I ask the "elei regulators" whether I also require an elei underneath? (*Samoa Observer,* 12 March 2003: 8)

One public servant said that it cost about 100 *tālā* 'Sāmoan dollar' for males and more for females, unless they were able to sew the uniforms themselves. Therefore this public servant argued that *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* was "too much for someone who earns less than $100 *tala* a week" (*Samoa Observer*, 8 March 2003: 8).

Before introducing *Lā‘ei Sāmoa*, male public servants were used to wearing a shirt with a tie and *‘ie faitaga* (Fig. 2). The Prime Minister pointed out: "The tie that usually goes with the suit is perhaps more expensive than the elei shirt" (*Samoa Observer*, 9 April 2003: 3). Unfortunately, however, his assertion proved to be wrong at the time when *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* was introduced. In those days, *‘ēlei* fabrics were only sold at two or three shops in Apia. Furthermore, the price of *‘ēlei* fabrics was usually higher than that of other printed fabrics, costing more than 10 *tālā* per yard (c. 90 cm). Male public servants had to pay for the fabric (20-30 *tālā*), tailoring (30-40 *tālā*) and the logo (10 *tālā*), while females had to pay an even greater amount. Thus, for some public servants *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* cost more than their weekly salaries and in light of that these criticisms and the negative reactions to the introduction of the *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* dress code were considered reasonable.

Figure 2. Male public servant wearing *'ie faitaga* before the introduction of *Lā'ei Sāmoa*, 2001 (photo by author).

WHAT MADE *LĀ'EI SĀMOA* THE NATIONAL ATTIRE?

Based on what was published in the *Samoa Observer*, the criticisms on the implementation of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* began to fade away in less than six months. After a year, when I visited Sāmoa in August 2004, most people accepted that public servants had to wear the *'ēlei* uniform every Wednesday and Friday. Most tailors I spoke to explained to me that *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was a new Government dress code. Their work places were full of different *'ēlei* fabrics. Moreover, I also noticed several Sāmoans who were not public servants wearing *Lā'ei Sāmoa*.[7] When I went back to Sāmoa in August 2005, one of my Japanese acquaintances told me that the government dress code had come to be very popular because anybody could easily get the logo sewn on their clothing. Not only public servants but also other Sāmoans, and even foreigners, could wear *Lā'ei Sāmoa*. The logo also was used on other types of clothing, like polo shirts and ties (Fig. 3), and became a souvenir item for visitors to Sāmoa.

Figure 3. The popularisation of the logo, Apia, 2005 (photo by author).

Within three years *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* seemed to have turned from a simple public servants' dress code to a costume that reflected national identity. What made this possible? Three factors can be identified. Firstly, one might seek to determine the historical and cultural authenticity of the "national attire" itself in Sāmoa, but this would be difficult task. Until the first missionary arrived, the Sāmoa Islands had rarely been unified by one ruler. The centralisation of power in Sāmoa was gradually accomplished through colonisation and finally Independence, yet the driving force of Sāmoan society has been and still remains their distinctive chiefly system, the centrepiece of *fa‘a-Sāmoa*. Historically, the authenticity of "national attire" is in a sense not traceable because there has been no distinctive "national attire" since Independence.

In fact, the arguments related to whether *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* was suitable as the "national attire" gradually came to converge with male fashion in the public/political sphere. At the end of April 2003, following the rules of Parliament, two senior Government officials were refused entry into the House because they were wearing *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* (*Samoa Observer,* 24 April 2003: 3). According to the *Samoa Observer*, Sāmoa's Parliament followed the rules and practices of the House of Representatives in New Zealand and

the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, where the standard dress was a tie and jacket, or just a tie (*Samoa Observer,* 24 April 2003: 3).[8] In this way, *fa'a-Pālagi* has been standard male clothing in the Sāmoan public/political sphere. Shortly after the incident reported above, *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was approved in Parliament, along with "a shirt with a tie" and "the traditional ceremonial wear", the last of which was worn by the first Prime Minister, as reported above. As a consequence, the Government was unable to determine what the proper dress in Parliament was.

Actually, Sāmoans could have asked whether the "traditional ceremonial wear" would be appropriate for their national attire, but nobody would have been able to give an authoritative answer about what was the national attire in the Sāmoan past. Some might insist that they should wear a grass skirts instead of *Lā'ei Sāmoa*, yet it is also true that wearing grass garments was not a practical solution. When *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was introduced, the Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi argued that the suit "was a remnant of the past, alluding to Sāmoa's colonial history" (*Samoa Observer*, 9 April 2003: 3). *Lā'ei Sāmoa* offered clothing that would symbolise "Sāmoanness" suitable to the times, as well as the chance to be rid of the influence of *fa'a-Pālagi* in male clothing at the national political level.

A second factor in the adoption of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* related to economics. Although *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was not driven by economic concerns, it indirectly brought economic benefits to the people. This was another reason that *Lā'ei Sāmoa* came to be accepted. The cost of *'ēlei* fabrics, one of the main reasons why public servants initially were dissatisfied with *Lā'ei Sāmoa*, was resolved by two major changes in the supply of *'ēlei* fabrics. In 2001, when I interviewed one of the long-established fabric shop owners about how cloth was imported to Sāmoa, he mentioned that *tapa* prints (*'ēlei*) were the only fabrics locally provided. At that time, his shop asked three or four Sāmoan women to make *'ēlei* fabric. His shop supplied only ten yards of plain material to the women and then bought the printed fabrics back from them for $5 *tālā* per yard. He emphasised that *'ēlei*-making did not have a commercial base and was mostly done by women at home. The ways of obtaining *'ēlei* fabrics before the introduction of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* were limited: one could find somebody to make *'ēlei* fabrics personally, try the shops or flea market or ask at Malua.[9] In addition, *'ēlei* fabric was more expensive to purchase than imported printed materials.

In 2003, most *'ēlei* fabrics were still produced by women at home. The procedures for making *'ēlei* fabric with *'upeti* was as follows (Fig. 4): (i) acquire five yards of plain material, a 42 *tālā* tin of fabric printing colour (*vali*), rollers and trays normally used for painting walls, and a 60 *tālā 'upeti* carved on both sides,[10] (ii) pour the *vali* into the tray and adjust the colour using the roller, (iii) put the *vali* on the *'upeti* using the roller, (iv) put the material

Figure 4. Hand-made *‘ēlei* fabrics printed by *‘upeti*, 2003 (photos by author).

on the *'upeti* and rub it with a small piece of paper that is wrapped around a stone, as if you were engraving an image on the material, and (v) repeat the same procedure (ii to iv) until all the material is decorated with the pattern.

Gradually, the institution of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* altered this home-based *'ēlei* production. In 2005, many producers were using stencils[11] instead of *'upeti*. The procedures for creating *'ēlei* fabrics with stencils was as follows (Fig. 5): (i) put three stencils with the same designs together, (ii) spread a plain material and put the stencils on the material, (iii) paint *vali* directly on the material using a small roller, and (iv) repeat (ii) and (iii). Compared to the fabric decorated using *'upeti*, *'ēlei* fabrics made with stencils are clearly and strongly coloured. According to the woman with whom I discussed the issue, stencils also provided more *'ēlei* designs and buying stencils (12 *tālā* each) was cheaper than buying *'upeti* (60 *tālā* each). Using stencils instead of *'upeti* thus had three advantages:

Figure 5. Hand-made *'ēlei* fabrics printed by stencils, 2005 (photos by author).

they were cheaper, they came in a wide variety of patterns and there was less labour involved. The first two enabled the producers to make a variety of *‘ēlei* fabrics in larger amounts, while the last one allowed the range of producers to expand from only women to men, and even children.

A bigger change in the supply of *‘ēlei* fabrics, however, was the introduction of mass production. In 2004, one of the biggest supermarkets in Apia broadcast commercials on the sale of *‘ēlei* fabrics on TV, and as a result the number of shops making and selling *‘ēlei* fabrics increased. In 2005, the mass production of *‘ēlei* fabrics overwhelmed the fabric market in Sāmoa, and two classifications of *‘ēlei* fabrics clearly emerged: “hand-made *‘ēlei*” (*‘ēlei e gaosi i Sāmoa* or *‘ēlei* fabrics made in Sāmoa) and “ready-made *‘ēlei*” (*‘ēlei e gaosi mai fafo* or *‘ēlei* fabrics imported from overseas). Of the 18 shops investigated, 11 were selling ready-made *‘ēlei*. Most shopkeepers selling ready-made *‘ēlei* mentioned their overseas sources, but people working at the Samoan Customs Department said most ready-made *‘ēlei* were from China. One shop-owner explained that Indo-Fijians had taken *‘ēlei* designs to China and arranged to have *‘ēlei* fabrics made there. The influx of ready-made *‘ēlei* fabrics caused the price to drop and several shops sold the ready-made *‘ēlei* by the roll (Fig. 6). The increase in ready-made *‘ēlei* fabrics prompted some people to question the authenticity of imported *‘ēlei* fabrics, yet ready-made *‘ēlei* were accepted for making of *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* in 2005. In particular, those who were working as executives in the Government sectors said that with ready-made *‘ēlei* the prescribed dress was affordable for many people in contrast to the expensive hand-made product.

A third and final factor in the uptake of *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* as a dress of national identity was the way it both enriched and diversified the Sāmoan culture of clothing. Unlike ordinary dress codes in Sāmoa, *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* hardly affected women’s daily dress practices. *Puletasi* are widely accepted as the most appropriate attire for Sāmoan women on ceremonial occasions. *Puletasi* can be tailored from any type of material. Sāmoan women delight in designing the combination of a top and *‘ie lavalava* or skirts of in terms of colours and styles.

Sāmoan women were especially pleased with *‘ēlei* fabrics as something new to enhance their *puletasi* style of dress. As ready-made *‘ēlei* became more available and varied, many people, particularly working or business women, always looking for a new dress, began to differentiate between *‘ēlei* attire used for ordinary and special occasions. Hand-made *‘ēlei* fabrics, they asserted, were for something special. They also made an effort to make the colour of their *‘ēlei* garments different. Before the introduction of *Lā‘ei Sāmoa*, it was rare to see gold or silver in *‘ēlei* printing. Over time, gold and silver were used more frequently and came to outrank other colours in popularity. The gold *vali* cost 120 *tālā* a litre, while other colours cost only

35 *tālā* a litre. Accordingly, *'ēlei* fabrics printed with gold or silver designs are more expensive; one shop sold *'ēlei* fabrics printed with gold and silver at 20 *tālā* per yard, while other colour prints were sold for 15-16 *tālā*. As a result of *Lā'ei Sāmoa,* Sāmoan women's clothing came to be diversified.[12]

As the use of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was popularised, most of the people I asked about *Lā'ei Sāmoa* in 2005 commented positively. They cited the following three reasons. The first was that *Lā'ei Sāmoa* promoted the significance of Sāmoan culture. In 2005, a Ministry official told me: "We revive *'ēlei*, our traditional *'ēlei*, which are different from Tonga and Fiji. Now, many people, especially men are carving *'upeti*, women and children are printing *'ēlei*. It provides many people with opportunities to engage in Samoan culture" (female officer in her 50s, pers. comm., August 2005). One of my female friends also commented that one of the effects of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was a revival of their cultural traits, in terms of not only screen-printing but also making *'upeti* designs. In this way, *'ēlei* fabrics and *'upeti*, the tool used in their production, became increasingly recognised as symbols of traditional Sāmoan culture. This was despite the fact that ready-made *'ēlei* dominated the fabric market and *'upeti* had been mostly replaced by stencils by 2005.

Figure 6. Bolts of mass-produced *'ēlei* fabrics, 2005 (photo by author).

Some Sāmoans, however, said that there were no problems with ready-made *‘ēlei* because they surely had Sāmoan designs, while others believed that hand-made *‘ēlei* were actually "true" Sāmoan *‘ēlei* fabrics, even though they were made by stencils.

The second reason voiced in support of *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* was that it created opportunities for many people to earn additional income. Most tailors and tailoring shops told me that the orders for making clothing from *‘ēlei* fabrics were definitely increasing,[13] while the official quoted above pointed out that many women benefited economically from the national dress code because they could make and sell *‘ēlei* fabrics.

The last reason for endorsing *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* was that it was suitable for the climate. One tailoring shop owner told me that Sāmoa needed comfortable clothing for the often hot and humid weather. A senior official in the Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet remarked:

> Before introducing *Lā‘ei Sāmoa*, male public servants had to wear a plain shirt with a tie at important meetings and official functions, which made us all sweat. It was so hot that we needed clothing suited to the weather. (Male officer in his 30s, pers. comm., August 2005)

* * *

Lā‘ei Sāmoa began as an official costume that was well-suited to the local climate. Over time it became affordable and promoted Sāmoan culture. Within three years, *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* had become a distinctive national attire which was a visual marker of "Sāmoanness". Its uptake also had fortuitous economic benefits for the Sāmoan clothing industry. Yet, I never heard *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* discussed in relation to *fa‘a-Sāmoa*. In considering the statement of the Prime Minister about the uniqueness of Sāmoan designs, and the successful initiatives of the Samoa Tourism Authority, I reflected on Harvey's (1996) ideas about "place" in globalisation. The acceptance and elaboration of *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* could be understood as a silent struggle of the nation to establish its "Sāmoanness" as distinct from *fa‘a-Sāmoa*. More specifically, it could be argued that *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* functions as a process of nation-building in a way that not only expresses the unity of Sāmoa as a nation in this globalising era, but also removes a signature of colonisation. It also should be pointed out that the acceptance of *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* was strongly supported by the changes in the way the fabric was produced. In particular, mass-produced fabrics, brought from overseas, enabled many Sāmoans to obtain inexpensive *‘ēlei* fabrics. Thus it was not only historical conflicts over what should constitute appropriate attire in relation to the national identity of Sāmoa, but also economic connections with the outside world that enabled *Lā‘ei Sāmoa* to find favour. As Massey

(1996 [1991]) argued, it is quite unlikely that the specificity of place could be reproduced without conflicts or any relations with outsiders.

Turning again to Massey's concept of place, she has recently elaborated her original concept, suggesting that "[m]aybe a new kind of sense of 'belonging' to place can be developed in relation to the responsibility of place. Here, place is a project in which we can participate: and in which the fundamental question could be: 'what does my place stand for?'" (Massey 2014). I also thought about who participates in reproducing the specificity of place and how. Most dress codes in Sāmoa targeted women and the rationale for these codes was phrased as respect for and adherence to *fa'a-Sāmoa*. *Lā'ei Sāmoa* prompted virtually no argument or discussion either about preserving *fa'a-Sāmoa* or about female attire in public/political space. In 2003, however, the Sāmoan Government also attempted to revive the quality and value of fine mats in ceremonial exchanges, which are very important as a part of *fa'a-Sāmoa* and plaited by women. Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi said, "I urge the mothers of Samoa today to return to weaving the traditional *Ie o le Malo* (Mat of the State)…. The hope of reviving our true cultural values can only be done through a collective effort" (*Samoa Observer*, 1 March 2003: 4). The Government referred to fine mats as *'Ie Sāmoa*, and the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development started to inspect the plaiting of the fine mats by women's committees in all villages.[14] In 2005 when I visited Sāmoa, two contrasting scenes were observed: working women in Apia who delighted in wearing *Lā'ei Sāmoa* as a new fashionable dress versus women in rural areas who were plaiting *'Ie Sāmoa*. Both phenomena, the institution of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* and the renaming and continued production of fine mats as *'Ie Sāmoa,* not only convinced me that the reproduction of "Sāmoanness" was encouraged by the Government initiatives, but also that different groups were involved in that process. This analysis of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* makes clear the necessity of asking not only what practices reproduce the specificity of place, but also who is willingly to participate in this enterprise.

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NOTES

1. Gatoloaifaʻaana Tilianamua Toʻomata Afamasaga (pers. comm., June 2009) explained to me that Namulauʻulu Lauaki Mamoe's attire, in his famous photo, was not intended to represent Sāmoan identity in opposition to the colonial administration. Ordinarily, he wore European clothing, just like the other Sāmoans, but when he made a speech on behalf of *aliʻi* he routinely put on clothing that was worn by orators in those days.
2. A half-caste whose father was European and whose parents were formally married could be a legitimate *ʻafakasi*. Illegitimate *ʻafakasi* were permitted to apply to the High Court, to register as resident aliens, though it was difficult. Legitimate *ʻafakasi* were legally allowed to inherit their father's estate, purchase liquor and enter a hotel in the same way as the European residents (Meleisea 1987: 162-63).
3. *Puletasi* is a two-piece garment with a top that reaches the thighs and an *ʻie lavalava*. Since about 2001, *ʻie lavalava* have been gradually replaced by a long slim skirt with slits, especially among young girls. From around 2009 onwards, not only the young, but also the older generations came to prefer using a skirt. Tailors recommended that it be made into a skirt because it is easy to wear and because it would use less material and cost less.
4. When I was conducting this research, there were at least two newspapers published daily in Sāmoa, the *Samoa Observer* and *Newsline*. I only used the articles from the *Samoa Observer* because it was the most widely circulated. Also I could collect items from old issues kept in the Nelson Library and by a Japanese tourist company located in Apia.
5. Margaret Mead (1977: 60) in the 1920s noted the decoration of cotton fabrics with printed *tapa*-cloth style patterns made using a carved board.
6. If there is money available the organisations sometimes pay for the fabric and the staff pay for the tailor.
7. Sāmoans often adopt "uniforms" to distinguish people in defined groups from others.
8. According to Penelope Schoeffel (pers. comm., December 2011), the judges are expected to wear white suits in the courts, including the Land and Title Court.
9. Malua is the village where the Malua Theological College for Congregational Christian Church in Sāmoa is located. In 2001, several people told me that they had asked some of the pastor wives staying at Malua to make *ʻēlei* fabrics.

10. Solosolo seemed to be one of the villages renowned for carving *'upeti*. My informant, who had 12 *'upeti*, explained that she bought them from a man staying in Solosolo. When I went looking for *'upeti* at the then-new market in Apia in 2005, a sales lady told me that she had come from Solosolo and that her *'āiga* 'family' was making *'upeti*. Although most informants in Apia told me that I could buy *'upeti* in the markets, I only found one shop selling them at that time. One *'upeti* cost 80 *tālā*.
11. Stencils were usually used for printing flowers on otherwise plain coloured *puletasi* fabrics. Stencils seemed to be made by young boys and they were also offered for sale by roving vendors. According to the owner of one shop, the police taught young boys in prison how to make *'ēlei* fabrics and stencils as part of a rehabilitation programme. These boys sold their stencils for 20 *tālā*, so the shop owner would select his favourite ones from among them. He commented, "No more *'upeti*. It is a new technology for *'ēlei*" (male shop owner in his 60s, pers. comm., September 2005).
12. When *Lā'ei Sāmoa* was introduced, new commercial activities started up almost concurrently in Apia. New shops sold distinctive and beautifully printed *puletasi* off the rack and many established tailoring shops turned to making *puletasi* decorated by original hand-painted or stencilled designs. The stencil printing skills were quickly adopted by others who produced *'ēlei* fabric elsewhere.
13. According to my 2001 observations, it was women who exclusively went to tailors to have their clothing made. In 2005, women remained the primary customers for tailors, yet the number of tailored male *'ofu tino* 'shirts' from *'ēlei* fabrics increased because of *Lā'ei Sāmoa*.
14. This mandatory practice was intended to stop the exchange of large numbers of *lalaga*, small, brown mats that "can be produced in several days". *'Ie Sāmoa* is "bleached white fibres, finely woven to a silky texture with a thin feathered lining" and "take months to weave" (*Samoa Observer*, 1 March 2003: 4). The Prime Minister wanted to "down-size these traditional functions which has become not only a financial burden to families but also a source of stress, conflict and disunity" (*Samoa Observer*, 9 April, 2003: 2). Fine mats have long been known as *'ie tōga*. The word *tōga* of *'ie tōga* means fine and valuable (Milner 1966: 272), but without the long vowel [ō] has been mixed up with *Toga* meaning Tonga (thus erroneously 'Tongan mat'). This linguistic situation might well have influenced the renaming of fine mats as *'Ie Sāmoa*.

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Personal Communications

Gatoloaifa'aana Tilianamua To'omata Afamasaga, 29 June 2009
Schoeffel, Penelope, 31 December 2011

ABSTRACT

This article considers reproduction of "Sāmoanness" through the process by which *Lā'ei Sāmoa*, a simple dress code for public servants, came to be viewed as the national attire. The initial objections at the inauguration of *Lā'ei Sāmoa* did not persist, because of the impossibility of establishing an acceptable historical and cultural authenticity of Sāmoan national attire. Over a three-year period, *Lā'ei Sāmoa* also brought fortuitous economic benefits to the Sāmoan clothing industry and diversified the Sāmoan culture of clothing. Considering how the Sāmoan Government took the initiative on the introduction of *Lā'ei Sāmoa*, it could be understood as the silent struggle of the nation to establish its distinctive "Sāmoanness".

Keywords: Sāmoan identity, *Lā'ei Sāmoa*, *'ēlei*, dress codes, national attires, globalisation, reproducing place

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