

Samoan Civil Wars Are Family Disputes: From the Author's Perspective

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Introduction:

The Samoan Islands, situated in the South Pacific, were among the many islands impacted by the wave of imperialism in the region. The Great Powers imposed their dominance on the islands they encountered and asserted their claims. The 19th century witnessed numerous upheavals and revolutionary changes in this regard.

Despite the numerous disputes among the Samoans vying for the Kingship of the island, the documented civil wars held great importance as they marked the onset of the Great Powers' influence among the islanders. This led to the emergence of foreign settlements around Apia harbour, establishing Apia as a pivotal port in the South Pacific. The exchange of land for food and weapons proved highly effective for the warring Samoans. Eventually, a truce was broken among the Great Powers, and treaties were signed to uphold peace between the foreign powers and the warring Samoans. (Kaoshy et al., 2008; Meleisea et al., 1987a).

Pre-History: Before Early 1800s:

For three hundred years before 1830, I'amafana was the first Tafa'ifa at the time of the "malo", which had remained with Aana. Before he died, he chose Malietoa Vainuupo as his successor for the Tafa'ifa but was opposed by most of the faleupolu (the orator groups who had the right to bestow the Tafa'ifa titles), especially the 'Faleiva' of A'ana." Tamafaiga, well known as the most powerful chief from Manono who gave himself the title "Tupu o Salafai," and Mataafa were the only other serious contenders for the Tafa'ifa. (Kaoshy et al., 2008; Meleisea et al., 1987a).

Malietoa Vainuupo, unsure of his ability to openly oppose Tamafaiga, supported him in his pursuit. He defeated Mataafa and won the Tafa'ifa. Unfortunately, his reign was short but brutally tyrannical, which turned the Aana against him and eventually led to his demise at Fasitoo-Uta village in 1829 (Meleisea et al., 1987a).

This turn of events encouraged Malietoa Vainuupo to continue his quest for the Tafa'ifa which his side was the victorious conquerors of the Tui Aana and Tui Atua titles and was later bestowed the Gato'aitele and Tamasoalii titles, which made him the holder of the Tafa'ifa titles. When he died in 1841, Malietoa Vainuupo made a controversial mavaega. The Tafa'ifā titles

were to split, and this was not well accepted by Talavou, half-brother of Molī, the son of Malietoa Vainuupo with a different mother (Meleisea et al., 1987a).

According to different historians, like Professor Meleisea and others, it was believed that Malietoa did not have the right to choose his successor to the Tafa'ifa since the pāpā belonged to the orator groups of Upolu, and another was that having accepted Christianity, he wanted no more wars over the titles and that he would be the last Tafa'ifa because of the coming of the gospel and Nafanua's prophecy. Samoa experienced many years of civil war between its four major aiga, or tribes, from 1870 (Meleisea et al., 1987a).

This escalated as the land began to be sold to Europeans, and the three Great Powers fought to wield their power over the islands. Germany was looking to expand its new empire and its commercial interests. America was also looking to protect its commercial interests, and the same goes for Great Britain. This was reason enough for a naval standoff among the three great powers, as neither wanted to surrender. Each great power stood behind each Samoan chief who supported their interests and looked at expanding their influence; the rivalry between them provoked local tensions in Samoa, and in 1886, the country erupted into civil war. (Ibid.)

The First Family Civil War:

The first family Civil War was a conflict between rival Samoan contingents; this political struggle lasted between 1886 and 1894." The cause of the fighting was primarily over whether Malietoa Laupepa, Mataafa Iosefo, or a member of the Tupua Tamasese dynasty would be King of Samoa. The intervention by the military of the German empires on several occasions had been inevitable, and this compelled Malietoa Laupepa to seek protection from Britain and the United States against its increasing influence in Samoa. (Kaoshy et al., 2008; Meleisea et al., 1987a).

When this was found out, they banished Malietoa Laupepa from Apia with their chief allies and placed rival Tupua Tamasese Titimaea on the throne of Samoa on September 15, 1887. However, this did not sit well with Malietoa Laupepa's supporters, and the fighting continued for two years. The great powers' ships positioned themselves around the Apia harbour, checking each other for months, but the bitter standoff was quickly diffused when a cyclone struck Apia harbour directly. While the locals fled inland, neither side was willing to evacuate their position until the storm hit, causing ship wreckage and destruction. This ended the hostilities, and both sides were made to agree to recognize Laupepa as King of Samoa again. (Kaoshy et al., 2008; Meleisea et al., 1987a).

The Second Family Civil War:

When Malietoa Laupepa died, the second family civil war broke out in 1898. Germany, the US, and the UK again battled to control the Samoan Islands. Mataafa Iosefo returned from exile at the death of Malietoa Laupepa and was elected to power by a council of Samoan chiefs backed by the Germans.

However, the British and US Navy combined forces and responded by supporting Laupepa's son, Malietoa Tanumafili I. Eventually, the Samoan crisis was resolved through treaty discussions among the three great powers, as explained in the Treaty of Amity.

Military Treaty Ambition:

In 1899, American, German, and British ships gathered in Apia Harbor on the German-held island of Upolu to sign the Anglo-German Treaty. The treaty divided the islands of Samoa into German and American territories, leading to a civil war among the islanders and a conflict involving the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. On January 16, 1899, the three countries convened to prevent further conflict (Meleisea et al., 1987a).

The European powers, the Empire of Japan and the United States saw the Pacific Ocean and its islands as potential bases, especially for coal refuelling, as ships then relied on coal for their steam-powered engines. Samoa, located in the Southern Pacific, offered a strategic location for this purpose.

However, the United States, Germany, and Great Britain all had trading posts on the four main islands of Samoa, and as they grew, the competition for regional dominance threatened to cause a war. In 1887, the three nations met in Washington to try to resolve their differences, as the Samoans were fighting amongst themselves, each being supplied by their controlling foreign power (Meleisea et al., 1987a).

The conference was unsuccessful, for in 1889, another treaty was signed, called, the Treaty of Berlin, which created a laissez-faire, live-and-let-live situation in which all three sides agreed to protect each other's mutual interest. However, the quest for conquest continued. With growing problems and all sides not following the "mutual interests" of each other, the Tripartite Convention of 1899, in which the Anglo-German Treaty was signed, seemed to settle the issue (Meleisea et al., 1987a; Kaoshy et al., 2008).

The Germans and Americans split the islands of Samoa. The Germans got the islands of Savai'i and Upolu, and the United States brought the islands of Tutuila and Manu'a. The British abandoned their claims to Samoa and gained possession and rights to many other areas, such as Tonga, near Australia (Meleisea et al., 1987a; Wendt, 1965).

Conclusion:

Samoa experienced many years of civil war between its four major aiga, contending for the Tafa'ifa titles. Despite the different accounts, all records indicate that Salamasina was the first holder of the Tafa'ifa titles, and Malietoa Vainuupo was the last (Kaoshy et al., 2008).

Many upheavals and revolutionary changes took place in the 19th century, and interesting accounts of the civil wars noted by the European settlers and how the explorers and settlers made Apia one of the main ports in the South Pacific, which attracted the Great Powers for its own political and financial gains, which later on drew a truce amongst themselves resulting in Treaties being drawn up and adhered to by both foreign settlers and the locals.

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