

## Gift-giving in Western Polynesia: lifting the contradiction between Samoa and Tonga

Serge Tcherkézoff

► **To cite this version:**

Serge Tcherkézoff. Gift-giving in Western Polynesia: lifting the contradiction between Samoa and Tonga . In M. Meleisea, P. Schoeffel

L. Tovio-Alesana (Eds.),. Pacific Islands University Research Network-Conference Proceedings 2016,, National University of Samoa and PIURN, Center for Samoan Studies pp.119-128, 2017, [http://samoanstudies.ws/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/PIURN-Proceedings-FINAL\\_27.10.2017.pdf](http://samoanstudies.ws/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/PIURN-Proceedings-FINAL_27.10.2017.pdf) . halshs-01742561

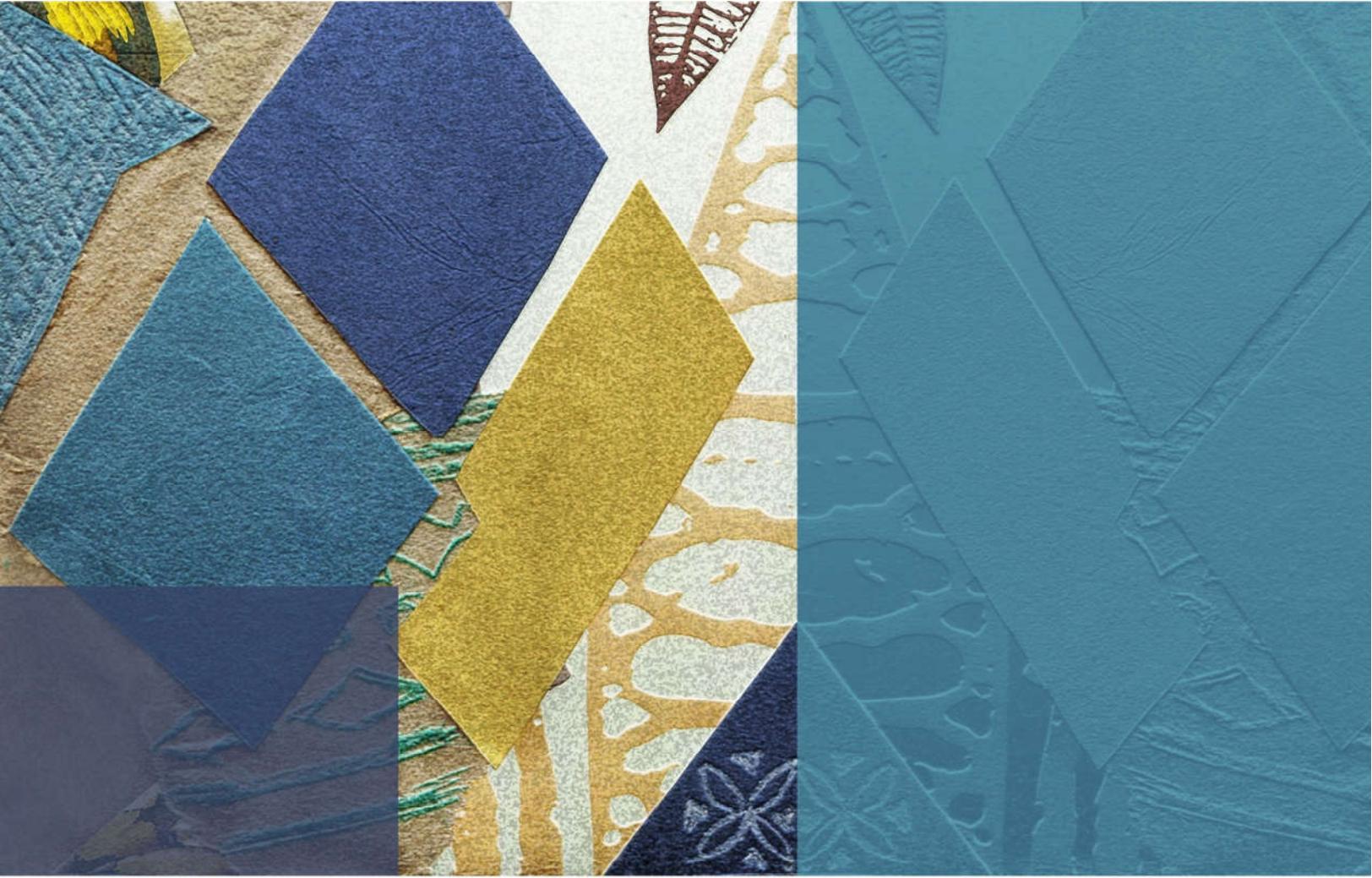
**HAL Id: halshs-01742561**

**<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01742561>**

Submitted on 25 Mar 2018

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

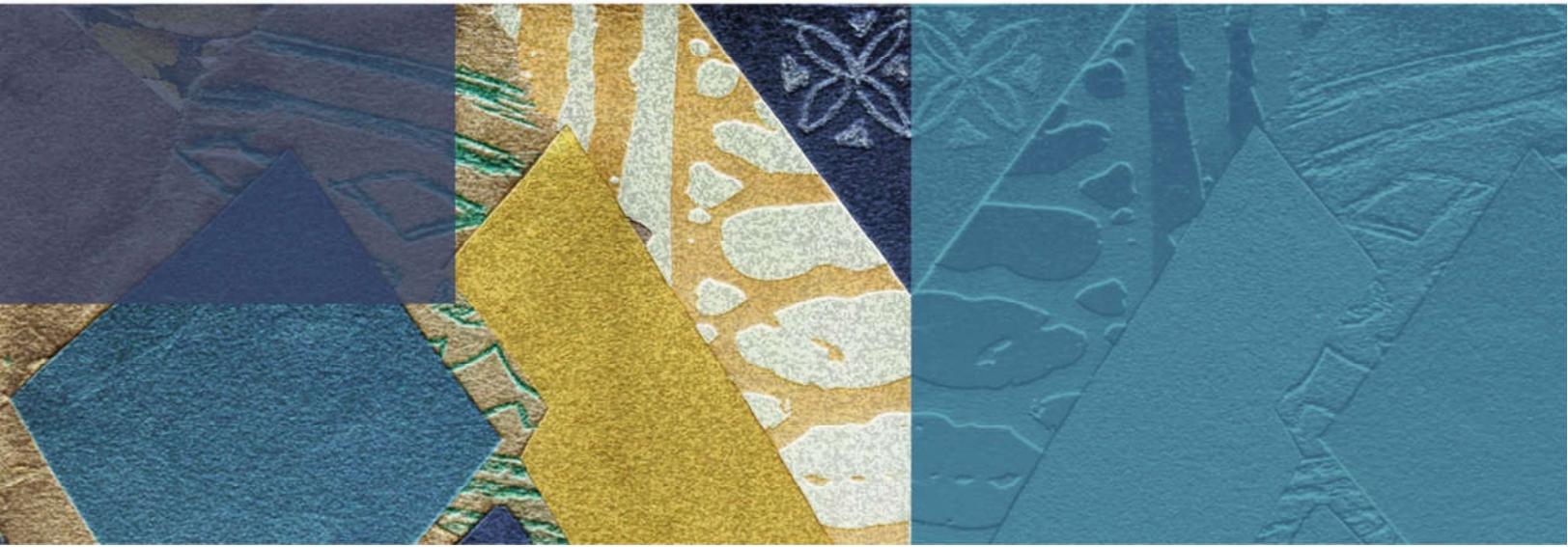


# PACIFIC ISLANDS UNIVERSITY RESEARCH NETWORK

National University of Samoa



Conference proceedings, 2016



# Pacific Islands University Research Network

## 2016

Paper presented at the  
Pacific Islands University Research Network Conference  
19 – 21 September 2016  
National University of Samoa, Le Papaigalagala.

Centre for Samoan Studies  
National University of Samoa  
Le Papaigalagala, 2017

Copyright (c) Centre for Samoan Studies, NUS, Le Papaigalagala, Apia, Samoa, 2017.

**Pacific Islands University Research Network  
Conference Proceedings, 2016.**

**edited by**

**Professor Meleisea Leasiolagi Malama Meleisea,  
Dr Penelope Schoeffel,  
Lorena Edith Tovio-Alesana.**

National University of Samoa Library CIP data

Pacific Islands University Research Network, vol. 2 : conference proceedings, 2016 / edited by Meleisea Leasiolagi Malama Meleisea, Penelope Schoeffel and Lorena Edith Tovio-Alesana.—Le Papaigalagala, Apia, Samoa : Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, 2017.

p. ; cm.

ISBN 978 982 9174 02 4.

1. Pacific Islanders – education (higher) – congresses.
  2. Education (higher) – research – Pacific area.
  3. Higher education and state – Pacific area – congresses.
  4. Research networks – Pacific area – congresses.
- I. Meleisea Leasiolagi Malama Meleisea.
  - II. Schoeffel, Penelope.
  - III. Tovio-Alesana, Lorena Edith.

Sam 378.19829994 Pac DDC22

Published by The Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, Le Papaigalagala, Apia, Samoa, 2017.

Cover Design by Nadya Vaa of Capital Designs.

Pacific Islands University  
Research Network

2016

Proceedings

## FOREWORD

The National University of Sāmoa was honoured to host the 2nd Pacific Island University Research Network (PIURN) Conference in Apia, Sāmoa from 19–21 September 2016.

The university warmly welcomed colleagues and students from Papua New Guinea, Australia, Fiji, Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, French Polynesia, New Zealand and Hawai'i.

PIURN is made up of 12 members, and the conference was kindly sponsored by Le Fonds Pacifique, Australia National University, UNESCO and Sāmoa Stationery & Books Ltd.

The conference focused on three key themes; firstly, meeting societal challenges using science, technology and innovation, secondly, Pacific regional co-operation in Indigenous art form and language in the 21st century, and thirdly, the evolving principles and practices in customary land tenure systems in the Pacific in the context of development pressures and climate change.

Before the opening, an 'ava ceremony was held to welcome all participants to Sāmoa. This was followed by an opening prayer by Rev. Opapo Soanai Oeti. Sāmoa's Deputy Prime Minister, the honourable Fiame Mata'afa Mulinu'u II gave the opening address. Each theme was addressed by a keynote speaker, on day one, Professor Chalapan Kaluwin presented on 'Climate change atmosphere and the mining of oceans'. On day two, Dr Cresantia Frances Koya Vaka'uta focused on 'Heritage and sustainability', and for day three, Fiu Mataese Elisara presented on customary land tenure and development pressures. The conference consisted of two parallel sessions, with 42 papers.

The NUS Local Organising Committee was chaired by Professor Meleisea Malama Meleisea and Peseta Dr Desmond Lee Hang. Special thanks to the committee members and helpers for their effort in ensuring a successful conference.

NUS Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Fui Le'apai Tu'ua Ilaoa Asofou So'o gave the closing address. The PIURN Board met during the conference, and it was revealed that Tahiti would host the next conference.

Dr Safua Akeli  
National University of Sāmoa.

## Contents

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>CAN STUDYING ETHNOCHEMISTRY AND ETHNOMEDICINE MOTIVATE STUDENTS TO LEARN CHEMISTRY?</b> BASIL MARASINGHE, SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	<b>9</b>
<b>FRENCH POLYNESIA AND THE FORUM</b> SÉMIR AL WARDI, UNIVERSITÉ DE LA POLYNÉSIE FRANÇAISE.	<b>17</b>
<b>CULTURE AND BIODIVERSITY IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC</b> ARNAUD DE RAULIN, UNIVERSITY OF FRENCH POLYNESIA	<b>29</b>
<b>REFLECTIONS ON THE LEGAL ADAPTATIONS AND SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FRENCH POLYNESIA</b> JEAN-PAUL PASTOREL, UNIVERSITY OF FRENCH POLYNESIA	<b>33</b>
<b>DEVELOPING HUMAN CAPITAL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA EXPERIENCE</b> OLIVE VAKALOLOMA BALOILOI, UNIVERSITY OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND M E BALOILOI PHD, EVILO CONSULTANCY LTD.	<b>41</b>
<b>THE IMPACT OF INLAND FISH FARMING IN THE EASTERN HIGHLANDS PROVINCE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA</b> RICKLY AITE AND ALAN QUARTERMAIN, UNIVERSITY OF GOROKA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA	<b>59</b>
<b>THE ROLE FOR ENGAGED ANTHROPOLOGY IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT</b> ALAN R. QUARTERMAIN, UNIVERSITY OF GOROKA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA.	<b>81</b>
<b>PROTECTED MARINE AREAS (PMAS) IN FRENCH POLYNESIA</b> ANTONINO TROIANIELLO, UNIVERSITY OF FRENCH POLYNESIA	<b>95</b>
<b>INFLUENCE OF VILLAGE OIL PALM PLANTINGS ON SMALLHOLDER FARMER LAND USE AND LIVELIHOODS</b> EZRAH TOGABALAGUGUWA AND ALAN QUARTERMAIN, UNIVERSITY OF GOROKA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA	<b>101</b>
<b>GIFT, MANA AND TAPU IN ANCIENT EASTERN POLYNESIAN SOCIETY</b> BERNARD RIGO, UNIVERSITÉ DE NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE	<b>111</b>
<b>GIFT-GIVING IN WESTERN POLYNESIA: LIFTING THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN SAMOA AND TONGA</b> SERGE TCHERKEZOFF, PROF OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND PACIFIC STUDIES, CREDO (AMU, CNRS, EHESS) AND EHESS@ANU	<b>119</b>
<b>THE LIFE GIVING GIFT IN HYEHEHEN</b> PATRICE GODIN, UNIVERSITY OF NEW CALEDONIA, NOUMÉA	<b>129</b>
<b>CASH PAYMENTS – IS IT CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL JUSTICE?</b> SASAE FUALAUTOALASI WALTER, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SAMOA	<b>135</b>
<b>“MY SAMOAN LANGUAGE SPEAKS TO MY MIND!” E TAUTALA MAI LE GAGANA SAMOA IA TE A’U!”</b> FONOMAAITU TUVALU FUIMAONO.	<b>147</b>
<b>FROM TRADITION TO CONTEMPORARY ART: REBIRTH OF ARTISTIC HERITAGE IN A CHANGING PACIFIC</b> LEUA LATAI, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SAMOA	<b>155</b>
<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>	<b>156</b>

## GIFT-GIVING IN WESTERN POLYNESIA: LIFTING THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN SAMOA AND TONGA

Serge Tcherkezoff, Prof of Anthropology and Pacific Studies, CREDO (AMU, CNRS, EHESS) and EHESS@ANU

### Introduction

Polynesia, more than Micronesia and certainly much more than the so-called “Melanesia”, is a cultural area: a young one (less than 2000 years of diversification between languages) and still unitary enough. Everyone acknowledges how closely related are all Polynesian languages. Thus, it is legitimate to systematically attempt comparisons between socio-cultural contexts from different Polynesian societies: world-views, kinship systems, relationship to land, etc. and, why not, categories of ceremonial gifts and exchange patterns. But at this point a difficulty arises. It has been asserted, repeatedly, that on that latter topic, comparison is not possible, even if we start with one sub region of the whole Polynesia, such as Western Polynesia: the Samoan and the Tongan case are too different and even contradictory.

The case in point turns around two words that occur in various Polynesian languages in closely related phonetic (but variously transcribed) forms: *toonga*, *to'onga*, *taonga*, etc. and *oloa*, *koloa*, *koroa*, etc. I have listed the Samoan form first: *toonga* and *oloa*. In Samoan official spelling, which ignores the diacritic signs, it is *toga*, but *tōga* in academic writing as the -o- is long. In this paper, I will write “*toonga*”, to remind that the first -o- is long, that the -g- is in fact a velar-nasal -ng-, and to make more easily visible for the reader that the word is closely related to the other words in the region, such as the well-known maori word for sacred gifts: *taonga*. In the different citations that I will do from 19<sup>th</sup> century or more recent ethnography and dictionaries, I will ignore the spelling used by the different authors (which has been variable) and I will keep throughout the text the form *toonga*. For the second word, I will keep the academic form *'oloa*, as the glottal stop in Samoan is useful to remind of the correspondence with the words *koloa*, *koroa* found in the other neighbouring languages.

Where is the contradiction between Samoa and Tonga? The Samoan *'oloa*, consisting in pigs, baskets of food and various objects, are the counterpart to the main gift of fine mats *toonga*, but the Tongan *koloa* are the main gift—first inversion—and are ceremonial cloth (“native cloth” or “tapa” as the Western literature calls it, *siapo* in Samoa) and not pigs, foods objects—second inversion. Françoise Douaire-Marsaudon, a long time researcher on Tonga and Uvea, has in her Ph.D and in her subsequent book (Douaire-Marsauson 1993: 407–8; 1998) that in Tonga and Uvea (Wallis), gifts are generally clearly distinguished into two categories: food (*kai* and other words, she says) on the one hand, and tapa-s and fine mats on the other hand, called *koloa*, *koroa*.

Comparison with Samoa is thus stopped at the start. Where Samoan *'oloo* include food and are presented (by anthropological literature) as clearly different from fine mats and tapa, in Tonga and Uvea, the same word designates ceremonial cloth, tapa and fine mats. Jocelyn Linnekin wrote: “[in Samoa] the normative structure of exchange events, the archetype of which is marriage exchange, is that toonga are exchanged for 'oloo.” (Linnekin 1991: 3), adding that in Samoa [I translate from my notes in French, did not go back to the exact text] “the female productions, tapa, coconut oil, ceremonial mats are called toonga while the male productions—canoes, tools, etc.—are called 'oloo” and that there is a “terminological inversion”, since in Tonga the *koloo* are the cloth and are the female production. Thus, in addition to the terminological inversion, we are faced with a gender qualification issue, which seems to put again the Samoan case aside from the region. Drawing on Linnekin’s distinction between female/male productions, Douaire-Marsaudon added that this Samoan type of exchange “where female goods are exchanged against male goods could be entirely unique [in Polynesia]” (1993: 408 et note 26; the author referred in her later publications to my work then in progress and stated that this contradiction may reveal to be only apparent; I quote her 1993 work only to show what was the state of the art view on this issue among Polynesianists of the time).

I will leave aside here the gender dimension, where the usual confusion leads into conflating (a) the observation of who makes the goods (yes women weave the mats or prepare the *siapo*) and (b) any gendered qualification of the goods in the ceremonial circuit: samoan *toonga* are not “female” per se (for a recent discussion on gender in Samoa, see Tcherkezoff 2017).

## **2. Back to the field:**

### **2.1 The word *toonga***

I heard in the 1980s, from aged Samoans, that one could say “*toonga*” when fine mats and *siapo* (tapa) are/were given together: “*here are my toonga.*” (It has been quite some time that *siapo* are no more presented in family ceremonial gifts—last time I saw it on a grand scale was when Samoa hosted the Pacific Arts Festival 1996 and presented gifts to the host delegations). I soon realised that what I heard then from some elders is well attested in the literature. All 19<sup>th</sup> century sources confirm: Krämer, G. Brown in the 1860s, Marist dictionaries, LMS dictionaries from 1st edition. All of them wrote (I retain here Brown’s words): “*The name for the fine mat is 'ie, and for the native cloth [tapa] siapo, but when property is interchanged the covering name for both these is toonga.*”

Details of sources: Krämer : the word “*toonga*” designates “*the gifts of fine mats and siapo*” (1995 : II, 125 note 186); Missionary Brown (in Samoa in the 1860s-1870s): “*The name for the fine mat is 'ie, and for the native cloth [tapa] siapo, but when property is interchanged the covering name for both these is toonga*” (Brown 1910: 304) ; Missionary Stair (1897 : 74),

who was there in the 1840s : “orators give to sacred chiefs *ali’i* gifts of food and receive from them native property which payment is called *Toonga* and consists of mats, *siapo*, or canoes” (the mention of “canoes” is surprising). LMS dictionaries: “*toonga*: native property consisting of fine mats and *siapo*” (Pratt, identical entry in the four successive editions from 1862 to 1911). Marist dictionary: “*Toonga* : richesses du pays consistant en nattes fines et en *siapo*. Sy. ‘ie. ‘ie *toonga*” (Violette 1879), which translates as: “*Toonga* : valuables of the country consisting in fine mats and *siapo* ; synonymous : ‘ie. ‘ie *toonga*.”

## 2.2 The notion of *fai-toonga*

A great source of knowledge are the Samoan narratives of gift exchanges recorded by Krämer. One *ali’i*, head of an *aiga*, must gather gifts for the *tufuga* (carpenter in this case) who made his new ceremonial house *fale tele*. The narrative (in Samoan) is in Krämer (1995, II: 276). I discard his German translation and translate from the Samoan text:

The *ali’i* spoke in this way :

*“we are going to make-toonga (faitoonga), we’ll start in the morning [...] and at the end of the day we will gather in my house to count our toonga. [when time came, the alii said] : spread out your toonga. One matai [head of a household within the large aiga: still the old meaning of “matai”] said: “here are my toonga, I have ten siapo and five ‘ie.” Another said: “we have four all together, in ‘ie toonga and in siapo.”*

(Samoan text:)

*Ona fa'apea atu lea 'o le ali'i: 'O le a tatou faitoonga a taeao e 'amata i le taeao / 'a e a o'o i le afiafi ona fa'apotopoto mai lea i lo'u fale 'o lo tatou 'āiga e aotele ai a tatou toonga / folafola mai 'o outou toonga / a matou toonga nei e sefulu siapo ma 'ie e lima / o a matou fo'i nei 'ie toonga ma siapo e fā /*

In the end, we learn from the narrative that some 50 *‘ie toonga* and 200 *siapo* were gathered. When all are presented to the *tufuga*, being deployed, the *ali’i* says to the *tufuga*: “here are your sacra (sa)”: *‘o le ‘ie lenei 'o sã 'o 'oe, le tufuga, ma lea ma lea fo'i*. And, at the beginning, the *ali’i* designates the *toonga* brought by his group as “*mea sina*” (ibid).

## 2.3 Conclusion on linguistic usage

1. The word for “fine mat” was *‘ie* or *‘ie toonga*, while *toonga* alone designated a larger category of gifts; other narratives show that it included ointments (body oil, with fragrances), finely weaved fans, combs. Today, as *siapo* is nearly no more given as a gift, the word *toonga* can of course designate just a fine mat, but then we must understand it is a shortened expression for “*‘ie toonga*.”
2. In the old narratives (many to be found in the German literature), the word was used only in a context of a gift, and not as a material designation. *Toonga* never meant “cloth” or “fine mat” as an object. A demonstration a contrario: neither yesterday nor today could you

designate a piece of *siapo* in itself as “a *toonga*.” The idea of “cloth” is carried by *‘ie*, yesterday and today. A fine mat *‘ie toonga* is a *‘ie* which is fit for the gift *fai-toonga*. And when one needs to mention or announce one specific fine mat, at the beginning of a gift ceremony, a mat which will may be designated as “the mat of the authority”, it will always be said *o le ‘ie o le malo*, and not *\*o le toonga of le malo* (not understandable).

In conclusion: the word *toonga* would designate only a context of gift where people, as it was said during last century, were “doing *toonga*” (*fai toonga*).

### **3. What is a Samoan toonga gift ?**

All 19<sup>th</sup> century descriptions of gift giving show that the gift of *toonga* (fine mats and *siapo* and...) always came as a counter gift to food, instruments, etc. and was said to cover, wrap-in the initial gift. Let us look at another narrative recorded by Krämer.

One *ali’i* from Tutuila is leading a *malaga*, a ceremonial visit to his wife’s family (in Upolu). His group has prepared and is bringing, to be given to the wife’s family, many pigs (*pua’a*), rolls of materials (*ta’aiga ‘ie*), lines of red feathers *‘ie ula* (rare, very precious as it was and still is the necessary item to be attached onto fine mats on the edges). Every time that the chief is mentioning the whole lot, he says only words like “things” *mea*; he says: “how many things [for gift] [should we plan] per orator *tulafale*?: *pe ta’ifia ni mea a tulafale?*” Or he uses the word *‘oloo* : “*fa’apotopoto maia ‘o ‘oloo a lo tatou ‘āiga ma tulafale?*”. Or even not any word, just saying “we have all together 200: *ona fa’apotopoto ai lea ai ‘ua ‘atoa le lua o selau pe tolu selau.*” Thus, just “things”, and never do we see the word *toonga* or the expression *fai-toonga* for those gifts brought in by the *malaga* party.

When the visiting party *malaga* arrives and presents the gifts, the wife’s family “takes the valuables of the visiting party: *ave ‘oloo o le Malaga*”. There are two days of banqueting. Then it is time for the presentation of the gifts given by the wife’s family: “Then comes the day to make the big presentation (*faisua tele*), it is done with *toonga* (*fai ai ma toonga*) which pay for the *‘oloo* (*faatatau i ‘oloo*); and it is brought (*na aumai*) by doing the covering (*fai ai ma le afu*).” Again it is said: then “they deploy, spread out (*folo mai*) the *toonga* which have paid (*taui*) the valuables (*‘oloo*), they deploy by doing a covering (*afu*): *ona folo mai lea ‘o toonga le taui o ‘oloo, folo mai ma le ‘afu.*” Other similar narratives, with the same words, can be quoted (Tcherkezoff 2016: 288–312; French written book but, in foot notes, Samoan texts are fully transcribed in Samoan language).

### **4. Polynesian Comparisons on toonga**

#### **4.1 PPN base**

“It is done with covering”: the gift of *toonga* is (with) a covering. We are led to think that the base *toonga* refers to this aspect of “covering” the initial gift. One linguistic hypothesis is

possible in that direction: the proto-polynesian base \*taqo-ga “covering”, “pressing down” (that gave in Samoan the word *tao* for cooking the earth oven food: *tao le umu*, in reference to the covering of the food required for this mode of cooking). I raised that hypothesis at the ESFO conference in 1998, and pursued a dialogue with the linguist Jeff Marck (who expands on that in his publication, see Marck 2000: Annexes).

Another very specialised discussion is then to be raised by linguists (again I quote from personal discussions with Jeff Marck). In short: if indeed the origin of the Samoan word *toonga* were to be the PPN Base \*taqo-ga, it could not have become the Samoan *toonga* without having been through an intermediary stage such as *to'onga*, with a glottal stop in between. Well, where do we have such word? In Tonga: the precious old fine mats were and are called *vala to'onga*.

We have here one more piece to add to the puzzle: the very ancient exchanges between Tonga and Samoa, the circulation of the Samoan fine mats in Tonga. Actually Samoan myths of “origin” of the fine mat are stories that happened in Tonga, where a mat, but which was previously just a “*fala*”, a “*mat*”, was brought by one girl (made prisoner with her friends by a Tongan party). When she deployed this mat, extraordinary things happened, and the mat saved their life (hence the words “*pulou o le ola*”, one famous name for fine mat: literally: covering their life) and that *fala* which saved the life of the prisoners became known as the first Samoan “*ie toonga*.” Later, those links with the kingdom of Tonga were misunderstood: an apparently rather old belief among Samoans, and taken up by missionaries and visitors—or perhaps propagated (invented?) by missionaries and visitors—was that the word *toonga* in the Samoan “*ie toonga*” refers to the Kingdom of Tonga (which is impossible: long o / short o).

#### **4.2 Opening the comparison: Samoa-Maori: *tooga-taonga***

The Samoan *toonga* would be the idea of an encompassing gift, the idea of covering and thus incorporating sacredness. The fine mats given are the *mea sina*, they are (said the Chief to the *tufuga*) “your sacra” (*ou sa*). Thus, not any material definition (cloth, mats etc.), but a wide cosmological notion of life-giving. If we were now to look into the wide body of myths, legends, ancient rituals for burials, it becomes very evident that the *toonga* is a life giving gift (and also for after life: wrapping the dead body in old times, wrapping the coffin today, etc.).

Then we realize how close the Samoan cosmological concept of *toonga* is to the Maori *taonga*, which is (no doubt the linguists tell us) it’s cognate. It is enough to read Paul Tapsell:

*“The traditionally accepted role of taonga is to represent the myriad ancestor-land connections, reinforcing the kin group’s complex identity and authority over their estates. [...] To reiterate, all items deemed taonga within the traditional Maori universe are directly associated with both ancestors and customary tribal lands. According to tradition, a taonga can be any item which recognisably represents a kin group’s genealogical identity, or whakapapa, in relation to their estates and tribal resources. Taonga can be tangible, like a greenstone pendant, a geothermal hot*

*pool, or a fishing ground, or they can be intangible like the knowledge to weave, or to recite genealogy, and even the briefest of proverbs » (Tapsell 1997 : 327, 331). The Maori taonga are not at all a category of object that could be materially defined : any item can become a taonga if it receives the mana through a proper ritual : « The elders decide the kaupapa (charter) of each item and under whose mana it will be controlled. Through the more public recitation of karakia [ritual formulae], the tohunga-ahurewa (spiritual specialists, priests) then empower the items with the wairua [soul] of certain ancestors, which transforms them into taonga” (ibid. 363).*

### **4.3 Beyond Samoa-Tonga-Maori**

The word is found (I skip the various references to the dictionaries used) also in Rennell-Bellona (ceremonial mat or *tapa* “offered to the gods”), Niue, but also in Tahiti, Hawaii, Cook etc., with, it seems, an interesting contrast between contexts:

- Tuamotu : in paumotu : “*tâo.a* or *tâo.nga*, to possess riches ; possessions, riches, items dear to their owner’s heart, in contrast with *tavênga* which are acquired goods; any valuable ; a dear child, a dear parent.”
- In Tahiti, since the first dictionaries: *tao’a*: “good, item, possession, riches, to be rich, gift” (in contrast, can we note to the Tahitian *tauha’a* which are “utensils, usual objects, furniture).”
- In Mangareva, the word *toonga* designated the *tapa* that could be ceremonially used to wrap a corpse at death.

There are other discussions worth pursuing: in Marquesian, the word *tona* “(add the idea of) dear, precious.” In Hawaiian, the word *kaona* applies to “the hidden meaning in a traditional chant.”

## **5. Turning to ‘*oloa* ?**

### **5.1 Samoan ‘*oloa* as riches in general**

The word ‘*oloa* in Samoa meant (and still can mean sometimes) a very general idea of riches, valuables, which did not predefine the content of that category. My notes of the 1980s: “ yes, I can say that the ‘*oloa* I have in my house, in case of a *faalavelave*, are my pile of fine mats ‘*ie toonga* and my boxes of tin food, money etc.”

### **5.2 The confusion with the new shops *faleoloa***

The 19<sup>th</sup> century western ethnography became confused and wrote so many times that ‘*oloa* are “foreign goods” (in contrast to “native goods *toonga*”) because of the expression *faleoloa* (shop), “the house of valuables”, which of course came to designate the early shops established by the settlers. These latter sold foreign imported goods, especially tools, and then tin food, and gave the same kind of items when they themselves entered into marriage within a Samoan

family. This would be the origin of what is now mistakenly called “the ‘*oloa* side of a gift giving” exchange in Samoa.

In fact, in a Samoan gift giving, ‘*oloa* as “riches” are given on all sides. Just that the side giving the “wrapping-in valuables” (fine mats, *siapo*, body oil) became understood, restrictively, by the foreign observers, as the side of the “native cloth” and—another mistake— a “female” side. It became the side of “*toonga* =fine mats”, because in the gifts included in the old encompassing notion *toonga* (the 19<sup>th</sup> century *fai-toonga*), soon only fine mats remained, while *siapo* gradually disappeared. On the other side, all the numerous “things” given, which did not have any common specific designation (as our narratives show) but were just “things” *mea*, or indeed collectively designated as riches “‘*oloa*”, became “the side of the ‘*oloa*” as if it were a specific counter category to the gift of fine mats, and a “male” category opposed to the other one, “female”.

### **5.3 Polynesian comparisons: ‘*oloa koloa koroa***

The word ‘*oloa koloa koroa* can be found in Futuna, Uvea, Tokelau, Rennel et Bellona , Tonga, Tikopia, Cook, Tahiti, Tuamotu, Aotearoa, Hawaii, every time with an accent on quantity, often with the precision that those valuables are distinct from food. For sure, the word goes back also to PPN, most probably with this general meaning of riches, valuables (of all sorts) and with a connotation of quantity, while *toonga*, *taonga* etc. are “sacra”, sacred gifts, sacred because incorporating *mana*, and covering wrapping-in as life-giving gifts.

As ‘*oloa* is just riches in general, and not specifically defined, it needs sometimes to be precised: for example, in Tikopia, one could talk of the « *koroa* of the chiefs »: *koroa nga ariki*. This connotation of quantity explains why it is this word that became used for the first shops opened by the foreigners: *fale ‘oloa*. Then gradually ‘*oloa* became restrictively understood as the things that are in the *fale ‘oloa*, the “foreign things” (the end of the 19th century literature abounds with that mistake).

### **6. Back to *toonga* : Polynesian cosmological scheme : encompassing, covering, incorporating**

One certainty: if ‘*oloa*, *koroa* etc. designated, in the precontact Polynesian area, a very general notion of riches, we have to think that the Samoa, Maori, Tahitians etc., words such as *toonga*, *taonga*, *taoa*, etc., when they qualified some specific ‘*oloa*, were adding some specialised meaning. This is a certainty. Which meaning? At this point, we can only have hypotheses: that this valuable ‘*oloa*, when given out, had the capacity of encompassing the initial gifts, the capacity of covering and incorporating the other (the other gift, the other group facing in the exchange).

Encompassing, covering, incorporating... Let us just remember how, everywhere when Europeans appeared, from Tokelau to Tahiti, the inhabitants tried to wrap them in (in fine mats

or *siapo*), hoping to be able to incorporate-domesticate some of the terrifying powers that these new comers obviously had, and also covering (incorporating) the gifts of foods and goods that these new comers were usually immediately presenting when coming on shore (Tcherkezoff 2003; 2009).

One last Samoan narrative can be quoted. It describes exchanges of gifts at birth:

*“The father’s family prepares (fai) the things-to-be-presented (si’isi’i) [like baskets of food, etc....] and the well-fed pigs (popo). They bring the whole to the mother’s family, who gets ready to make-toonga (fai ai toonga) that are paying (totogi) the things (mea) of the father’s family. They [those gifts] are the toonga for the food cooked (suavai), **the toonga which covers (ufi) the things brought in (si’isi’i)**, the toonga for the well-fed pigs (popo), the toonga for the baby’s bedding (ulumoega), the laufau [reference to the lot of fine mats that had accompanied the bride in her marriage ceremony], the ‘ie [from now on the word is constantly ‘ie] of the evaeva [refers to the mother’s leaving her birth place], the ‘ie for the child to grow (faatupu), the ‘ie for the cutting of the umbilical cord, the ‘ie for the [cosmological] Po, the ‘ie for the vaisalo [the baby’s first food], the ‘ie for the separation with the parents of the mother and of the father, the ‘ie for the sacred ground of the village (malae).”*

*“Ona ô ai lea 'o le 'âiga o le tane, 'ua fai si'isi'i ma le popo. Ona 'aumai ai lea i le 'âiga o le fafine, 'a 'o le 'âiga o le teine, 'ua fa'asaga e fai ia toonga e totogi ai mea a le tane. 'O mea nei 'o le a 'ave 'o le toonga o le suavai, **'o le toonga e ufi a'i si'isi'i**, 'o le toonga o le popo, 'o le toonga o le ulumoega, 'o le laufau, 'o le 'ie evaeva, 'o le 'ie fa'atupu, 'o le 'ie o le tââga o le uso, 'o le 'ie o le pô, 'o le 'ie o le vaisalo, 'o le 'ie o le mavaega a le matua o le teine ma le matua o le tane, 'o le 'ie o le malae.” [words highlighted by me]*

As we can see, on the father’s side, the gifts are designated just with the word “things” *mea*, or “presents”, things “to be presented” or that “are presented” *si’isi’i* and even one must add: “and the pigs...” (*ma le popo*) But on the mother’s side there is a very specific word to refer the whole: *toonga, fai-toonga*. And we have again the notion that the *tooga* are “paying” *totogi* the initial gift. Of course we must understand it is a non-monetary transactional way: they are “paying” also for the body itself of the baby, for the umbilical cord, for the cosmological world where the baby comes from (the *Po*), paying for the social relationship to the families, the relationship to the sacred ground of the village.

And, again, the *tooga* are “covering” the fathers’ side gifts: *'o le toonga e ufi a'i si'isi'i*.

I am tempted to add one point: the very fact that different common words are used in the narratives to express the idea that the *toonga* covers the initial gift (one can find : *afu, ufi, pulou*) shows that this idea of covering is not an esoteric notion, buried in the far away beginnings of the Polynesian civilisation, and was quite explicit in the minds of the 19<sup>th</sup> century actors (as it was in their 18<sup>th</sup> century forefathers when *Papalagi* appeared on Polynesian shores and the initial move was to quickly wrap them in). Of course they did not realize that, perhaps (I would say: certainly) their very word *tooga* carried this etymology of covering, but that truly happened long ago and that indeed became buried in the past.

Let us conclude with one image that tells it all, about this cosmological representation of life, of the total persona. In Samoa, not so long ago, when making an *ifoga*, the members of the party asking for forgiveness were coming in front of the house of the offended party, then they sat outside, holding stones of the type used for the earth oven *umu*, thus presenting themselves as food to be cooked, but wrapping themselves, covering the head and the whole body, into a finemat as a sacred shield and a hope for life (and indeed we have no narrative of spears or stones thrown through the fine mats covering the *ifoga* party). I would suggest that this Samoan image of the fine mat wrapping the body, a body ready to become food but which will gain life because it is wrapped in a fine mat, is how we should understand the duality *'oloa-toonga* in the Samoan gift giving and indeed in the ceremonial gift system of the whole of Polynesia.

### References

- Brown, G. (Rev.). 1910. *Melanesians and Polynesians: Their life-histories described and compared*. London, Macmillan.
- Douaire-Marsaudon, F. 1993. "Les premiers fruits. Parenté, identité sexuelle et pouvoirs en Polynésie occidentale (Tonga, Wallis et Futuna)." Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Ph. D [ref. under Marsaudon, Françoise]).
- Douaire-Marsaudon, F. 1998. *Les premiers fruits. Parenté, identité sexuelle et pouvoirs en Polynésie occidentale (Tonga, Wallis et Futuna)*. Paris: CNRS Éditions et Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
- Krämer, A. 1995. *The Samoan Islands* (2 vol.). Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. (translation of 1902. *Die Samoa-Inseln* (2 vol.). Stuttgart: E. Nagele)
- Linnekin, J. 1991. "Fine mats and money: contending exchange paradigms in colonial Samoa." *Anthropological Quarterly*, 64 (1): 1–13.
- LMS Dictionary. 1862. *Dictionary of the Samoan language*. Apia: Malua.
- Marck, J. 2000. *Topics in Polynesian Language and Culture History*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
- Stair, J. B. (Rev.). 1897. *Old Samoa, or flotsam and jetsam from the Pacific ocean*. London: The Religious Tract Society.
- Tapsell, P. 1997. "The flight of Pareraututu: An investigation of Taonga from a tribal perspective." *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 106 (4): 323–374.
- Tcherkezoff, S. 2003. "On Cloth, Gifts and Nudity: Regarding Some European Misunderstandings During Early Encounters in Polynesia", in *Clothing the Pacific*, ed. Chloe Colchester. Oxford, Berg: 51–75.
- Tcherkezoff, S. 2009. "A Reconsideration of the Role of Polynesian Women in Early Encounters with Europeans." Pp. 113–159 in *Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence*, eds. M. Jolly, S. Tcherkézoff, D. Tryon. Canberra: ANU E Press.  
[http://epress.anu.edu.au/oceanic\\_encounters\\_citation.html](http://epress.anu.edu.au/oceanic_encounters_citation.html)
- Tcherkezoff, S. 2016. *Marcel Mauss à Samoa: le holisme sociologique et le don polynésien*. Marseille: Pacific-Credo Publications.

- Tcherkezoff, S. 2017. "The Samoan Village, the Brother-Sister Relationship and the Rule of Exogamy." *Journal of Samoan Studies, Volume 7 No. 2* (special issue: The Sāmoan Village: Past and Present. 'O le Nu'u Sāmoa: Anamua ma Onapō nei).
- Violette, L. (Père). 1879. Dictionnaire Samoa-français-anglais et Français-samoa-anglais. Paris: Maisonneuve.

## Contributors

**Professor Basil Marasinghe** is the Vice Chancellor of the Solomon Islands National University.

**Dr Sémir Al Wardi** is an Associate professor in Political Science at the Université de la Polynésie française. He is also the Director of the Département of Law and economics.

**Dr Arnaud De Raulin** is a Professor at the University of French Polynesia.

**Dr Jean-Paul Pastorel** is Professor in public Law (University of French Polynesia) attached to the Research Center “Gouvernance et Développement Insulaire” (GDI). He took up the role of Vice-Chancellor of the University of French Polynesia in March 2017.

**Dr Olive Vakaloloma Baloiloi** teaches in the Division of Environmental Science and Geography in the School of Natural and Physical Sciences.

**Professor Misty Enosi Baloiloi** is currently the Chief of Staff, Opposition, Parliament of Papua New Guinea.

**Rickly Aite** is currently teaching agriculture and advanced natural resource management at Kabiufa Adventist Secondary School, Eastern Highlands Province. Rickly holds a Diploma in Tropical Agriculture, Bachelor of Agriculture Extension, Bachelor of Education majoring in agriculture and a Post Graduate Diploma in Agriculture Extension and Rural Development.

**Dr Alan Quartermain** is a Professor of Agriculture at the University of Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea. He specializes in livestock development, traditional gardening, rural development, agricultural education and institutional development.

**Dr Antonino Troianiello** is a Professor at the University of French Polynesia.

**Ezrah Togabalaguguwa** is currently a student doing the Master of Science (Agriculture) Post Graduate Program at the University of Goroka. His current field placement is with the West New Britain Provincial Administration Agriculture and Livestock, Papua New Guinea.

**Dr Bernard Rigo** is a Professor at the University of New Caledonia.

**Dr Serge Tcherkézoff** is a Professor in Anthropology and Pacific Studies (EHESS University, France), attached to the French center for Pacific Studies that he co-founded in 1995 ([www.pacific-credo.net](http://www.pacific-credo.net)) and to ANU (Honorary).

**Dr Patrice Godin** is an Associate Professor at the University of New Caledonia.

**Sasae Fualautoalasi Walter** since the beginning of 2017 is the Coordinator for the Pacific Island Law Office Network at the Samoa Attorney General’s Office.

**Fonomaaitu Tuvalu Fuimaono** is the national Adviser Pacific Responsiveness for PHARMAC (New Zealand Government funding agency for medicines). He leads the work within PHARMAC of engagement with Pacific communities and the implementation of the Pacific Responsiveness Strategy 2017–2026.

**Leua Latai** is a Senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education, National University of Samoa.

**National University of Samoa**

ISBN 978-982-9174-02-4



9 789829 174024

**Title :** Pacific Islands University Research Network, : conference proceedings, 2016