

RETURN MIGRATION TO AMERICAN SAMOA

Fepulea'i Micah Van der Ryn
American Samoa Community College

E lele le toloa ae toe ma'au i le vai.

(The duck may fly about, but in the end will always return to the water [its home].)

A common Samoan proverb used to refer to the need and desire to return home after a time spent away.

IT IS 1990. I am interviewing Dan and June Pouesi, Samoan-American residents of Southern California, as part of the production of the ethnographic video *A Chief in Two Worlds* (Van der Ryn 1991a). The topic of return migration to the Samoan islands, in particular to American Samoa, comes up. Dan says, "Most people say it's the ultimate dream to return to the island [Tutuila, the largest and most populous island in American Samoa]. But in reality, very few do return." June adds with a chuckle, referring to a commonly repeated phrase, "If everybody returned, the island would probably sink. There's quite a lot of Samoans outside of American Samoa." June continues:

I have no false dreams. I would not go back to Samoa to live.¹ But I think that many of the military people, when they retired . . . there were a lot of words about going back and several did go back. . . . [Some] were able to access their lands again; others met up with dispute of land back there [and were told,] "Well, you went out to work in California, or you spent your time and played

around in America, . . . but, we stayed here, and cultivated the land, it's no longer yours." And so you have that conflict. (Interview for film, not in final edited version.)

The number of diasporic Samoans who count American Samoa as their homeland is far greater than the 55,519 people living in the 78 square miles (202 km²) of mountainous islands that constitute American Samoa. Return migration to American Samoa, mainly from the Samoan diaspora based in the United States, has increased in recent years, so an increasing percentage of residents in American Samoa consist of "returnees"—people who have lived a substantial part of their lives away from Samoa. The recent global economic downturn, beginning in 2008, prompted American Samoa's governor to ask American Samoans to make room for family members returning to live on family lands. Soon after there was an influx of returnees, including many young and middle-aged people who needed to find jobs, but at least they had the security of family lands and, often, places to stay temporarily until better housing could be found or built.

Return migration is an important aspect of diasporic and transnationalized Samoan identity, kinship institutions, and communities. This essay represents a preliminary examination of return migration to American Samoa, mainly from a transnational conceptual framework. It is based on two in-depth case studies of return migration conducted in Tutuila in 2008 and interviews with five additional American Samoan returnees in 2009. The purpose is to identify patterns of return migration to American Samoa and to relate the analysis to transnational kin-based networks in which child rearing, ceremonies, political leadership, and economic support are fully a part. Samoan return migration connects to Samoan ways of addressing the values of kinship, money, socialization, identity, chiefly titles, land, and concepts of *tautua* (service), *alofa* (compassion), and *fa'aaloalo* (respect behavior) in social hierarchies. I explore return migration to American Samoa as a cultural act within a transnationalized Samoan system of life that helps describe the Samoan diaspora. I also highlight how differences in governmental policy with regard to key institutions, such as Samoa's indigenous system of *fa'amatai* (Samoa's chieftain or *matai* system), differentially impact patterns of return migration between the U.S. unincorporated territory of American Samoa and the independent country of Samoa (formerly Western Samoa).

Socioeconomic, cultural, environmental, and political conditions vary between islands, posing different realities when it comes to opportunities or desires to return. Patterns and possibilities of return migration are affected by the degree of geographic remoteness and size, population

density, environmental degradation, and resources, as well as individuals' sense of where they belong, the structure of indigenous kinship and political institutions, legal policies of government, and the life stages people are in. Those who return are (or at least were) part of the group's diasporic community. Consequently, the population of the Samoan islands is partially composed of people from the diaspora. Their identities have been fashioned in part by their migratory experiences and the ways they interrelate concepts of "home," "ethnicity," "kinship," "community," "place," "center," and "periphery" within the varying folds of their geographic and cultural experiences. Thus, the topics of "return" and "reincorporation" into the home community are critical components to examine within the more general topic of Oceanic diaspora and its concomitant identities.

Background of Contemporary Samoan Migration

Major migration from American Samoa to the United States began in the early 1950s when the U.S. Naval Administration removed its naval operations from Pago Pago. Samoan naval employees and their families were offered free passage, jobs, and resettlement in naval communities in Hawai'i and on the West Coast of the United States (notably in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego). Large-scale migrations out of what was then known as Western Samoa to New Zealand, for both employment and educational purposes, began about the same time.² Movement to the United States and New Zealand established links for a process of chain migration to develop. By 1972, authorities in Pago Pago concluded that approximately 500 people were leaving every year. The 1990 U.S. census indicated that 62,964 Samoans were residing in the United States, constituting the second largest Pacific Island ethnic group after Hawaiians. Not everyone leaving American Samoa for the United States sought wage employment. Others left for military service, higher education (some on government scholarships), or to be babysitters in households of relatives already established overseas (Janes 2002).

The division of the Samoan islands into two political entities has resulted in significant economic differences. For starters, wages in American Samoa are much higher than in independent Samoa. Two large, foreign-owned tuna canneries, established in Pago Pago Bay in the early 1960s, became the largest employers (after the government) in American Samoa. This situation also stimulated a new migratory path for citizens of independent Samoa, who enter American Samoa as "aliens." The canneries as well as other sources of employment in American Samoa became increasingly important as New Zealand's economy experienced economic slumps and

the government there began restricting Samoan immigration. As a result, American Samoa increasingly became a stepping-stone for Western Samoans to enter the United States, as well as a migration destination in itself for citizens of Western Samoa.

By 2010, the population of American Samoa had grown to 55,519, an almost threefold increase from its 1960 population of 20,051. While the population as a whole has grown rapidly, the proportion of “immigrants” has grown even more. Whereas the population of “foreigners” (neither U.S. citizens nor U.S. nationals) in 1980 was 34 percent, by 2008 that figure had grown to 55 percent (Jackson 2009). The vast majority (over 90 percent) of these immigrants are citizens of independent Samoa.

Previous Research on a Transnationalized Samoan Social System

In the late 1980s, while conducting fieldwork in the Samoan community of Southern California (whose population was then about 20,000), I observed the salient ways that overseas Samoans (of whom about half were from American Samoa, the other half from independent Samoa) maintained connection and interacted with home communities and kin in the islands. Despite the huge contrasts between the urban concrete ghettos of Southern California and the lush, green, bucolic villages of the Samoan Islands, through my multisited ethnographic work I came to learn that both locations were part of a single “ethnoscape,” a Samoan transnationalized world tied together by flows of people, money, tangibles such as Samoan fine mats, and intangible cultural properties such as kinship and *matai* (chief) titles.

This fieldwork and film production were conducted just prior to the development of an anthropological literature in the early 1990s that adopted the terms and concepts of “transnationalism” to describe the social, cultural, and economic linkages maintained within ethnic communities between host and origin countries, which are important elements of identity and mobility patterns (Cassarino 2004: 7–8; Lilomaiava-Doktor 2004, 40). Previously, the term “transnationalism,” as originally developed by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (1970), mainly referred to activities within a worldwide capitalistic system in which groups such as corporations were largely dependent on transactions that took place across national borders. Less developed societies such as the Samoans were either left out of the equation or characterized as passive recipients of change. But my observations of Samoan transnational action and identity compel me to challenge the view of less-developed societies as passive recipients of change brought about by globalization.

On a fairly regular basis, Samoan village groups—for example, an *aumaga* (village association of untitled men), an *aualuma* (association of unmarried natal women of a village), or a church youth group—would come as *malaga* (visiting parties) from independent Samoa or American Samoa in groups of thirty to fifty to be hosted by diasporic Samoan groups in Southern California. The visiting groups engaged in Samoan dance and ceremonial and economic gift exchanges with their hosts before returning to their villages with financial resources to use for community projects such as a school, a clinic, or a new church building. These *malaga* are an extension and adaptation of a Samoan tradition of intervillage visiting and serve as a system for maintaining social ties between groups, creating avenues for links such as marriages, and redistributing wealth between whole communities.³ I observed some cases where members of the visiting *malaga* remained in the United States to seek educational and employment opportunities as potential means of providing *tautua* to their families and communities back home in the Samoan islands.

Another important event I witnessed during my fieldwork in the late 1980s was the commissioned visit of a Samoan *tufuga ta tatau* (tattoo artist) to Los Angeles to perform *tatau* and *malu* (extensive traditional tattooing) on thirteen Samoan men and four women, which took place after the conferral of Samoan chiefly titles on some of the men by a visiting high talking chief from Samoa. The conferral of Samoan *matai* titles outside of their village of origin was understood to be a controversial act and a breach of custom because titles are supposed to be conferred in the village of origin with the consent of the wider descent group.

As a case study for a documentary film, *A Chief in Two Worlds* (Van der Ryn 1991a), I followed the story of Taituave John Hunkin, a Samoan who had been based in Los Angeles for thirty years. He had received the chiefly title of Taituave from his wife's descent group in Falelima, Savai'i (independent Samoa). It was conferred in Los Angeles. Later, he learned that the conferral of the title in Los Angeles would not hold legitimacy back in Samoa, so he embarked on a journey with his wife to have the bestowal done properly, in Falelima, where the title originates and is connected with an important post in the village meeting house. The film documents the journey to the village, concerns expressed by members of the descent group, the process of resolving those concerns, and the preparations for and conduct of the ceremony and exchanges. It also includes Taituave's return to Los Angeles, where with his now-registered chiefly title he begins to take a more active role in the community.

In the process of doing research I began to envision the Samoan transnationalized system as a large circle in which Samoa comprises the center,

and Pacific Rim countries—the United States, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Australia—form the periphery from which money is extracted and processed in the manufacture of Samoan prestige. This conception turns Immanuel Wallerstein's 1974 world system model inside out. The idea that every cultural system has its own categories for what constitutes central and peripheral arenas of their cultural world is already well established. However, it is helpful to describe exactly how center and periphery or related concepts such as “home” and “overseas” or “off island” are socially and culturally constituted for describing patterns of action and mobility in these systems.

The recent writings of Samoan geographer Sa'iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor have taken up this topic in depth (2004, 2009). She has argued against explaining Samoan international mobility through the Western theoretical tropes conventionally used in migration theories. The construction of dichotomies such as rural/urban, periphery/core, local/global, micro/macro, and a focus on inequality and economic opportunity, she asserted, cannot entirely explain Samoan mobility patterns (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009, 3). Rather, she contended that Samoan mobility, and the experience thereof, is best interpreted through indigenous Samoan terms and concepts, such as *malaga* (travel) and *vā* (the space between)—a reference to the relationship between people and entities that both binds them together and separates them.

Lilomaiava-Doktor has suggested that the expanded geographic circuits that Samoan mobility now entails are centered mostly on people attending events so as to activate, engage, create, and maintain the all-important *vā*. Maintaining and reproducing *vā* through socio-spatial practices known in Samoa as the *vā-fealoa'i* (the respectful social space created through movement and interacting with others) is commensurate with principles of how social order is constituted, reproduced, and made attractive and enjoyable to people. Lilomaiava-Doktor demonstrated that the *vā* between social entities in the islands and other countries (what she described as *inei* and *i fafo*) provides a framework for describing and interpreting Samoan mobility as culturally nuanced and signifies cultural actions that occur between the Samoan Islands and overseas locations. While supply and demand in international labor markets are important influences, Lilomaiava-Doktor's argument is that more accurate understandings about mobility can only be achieved when theoretical frameworks incorporate local epistemologies, in particular local ideas about space, time, and social relationships that largely shape mobility patterns. Her argument demonstrates how Samoan indigenous concepts and practices support a transnational framework for analysis.

The Samoan international mobility patterns that Lilomaiava-Doktor has described and theorized about focus on Samoan visiting patterns for events such as church conferences, funerals, weddings, chieftain installations, graduations, traditional tattoo completions, guesthouse or church dedications, and so forth. However, her points about the importance of including indigenous Samoan concepts in the analysis of movement apply equally well to the study of return migration.

Conceptual Frameworks for Examining “Return Migration”

Until the early 1960s not much specific attention had been paid to return migration. George Gmelch’s 1980 paper in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* was one of the first to stimulate “scientific debate among scholars over the return phenomenon and its impact on origin countries” (Cassarino 2004, 1). Gmelch defined international return migration as “the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle,” though he stated that analytically distinguishing a “returnee” from someone who returned only to “visit” might be difficult in some settings (1980, 136). “It was generally assumed that those who left the Old World never returned. . . . The thousands of migrants who returned to their homelands, including an estimated one quarter of the 16 million Europeans who arrived in the United States during the early decades of this [twentieth] century, were barely noticed by social scientists” (1980: 135–36). Gmelch reported that part of the problem was lack of quantification: “While most countries gather information on incoming aliens, the same does not apply for returning citizens” (Gmelch 1980, 136). Certainly this is the case in the U.S. territory of American Samoa.

Gmelch reviewed a number of return migration studies in various countries (Ireland, Jamaica, Mexico, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain, Turkey) to elicit patterns and issues by which a typology of return migrants might be formulated. The following themes emerged in the studies: (1) motivations for the return; (2) whether return is seen as temporary or permanent; (3) whether return is seen as voluntary or involuntary; (4) how returnees, as well as others of the origin country, view the return (e.g., as a result of a “failed” or a “successful” overseas migration experience); (5) the process of adaptation and reincorporation in the country of origin; and (6) the social, cultural, and economic impact (positive or negative) on the home community. While all these themes are worth exploring, the data I have so far collected pertain mostly to themes 1, 2, and 3.

Jean-Pierre Cassarino’s 2004 working paper, “Theorising Return Migration: A Revisited Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants,”

summarizes four theories for the insights they provide for the analysis of return migration: (1) neoclassical economics and the new economics of labor migration (NELM), (2) structural approaches, (3) social network theory, and (4) transnationalism. Cassarino stated that these approaches “differ from one another in terms of level of analysis and with respect to the salience of the issue of return in their respective analytical frameworks” (2004, 2).

Neoclassical economics focuses on the experience of migrants in terms of how well they met their financial expectations, in other words, success or failure. A migrant’s return is viewed as a sign of a failed migration experience: an inability to earn expected income levels overseas forces the return. Alternatively, NELM takes the view that migrants go overseas to reach certain economic goals (e.g., savings) for themselves and their households. Return is seen as the logical result of having successfully reached those goals.

Unlike the neoclassical economic and NELM approaches, the structural approach takes into greater consideration conditions and institutional factors in the country of origin in relation to the returnee’s goals and expectations. It also focuses more on how returnees reintegrate into their origin country, including their contribution to local economic development and to social change in the origin country.

As introduced in the last section, transnational analysis focuses on “processes by which immigrants [called transmigrants] build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. . . . [They] develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders, . . . [They] take actions, make decisions, feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously” (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1995: 1–2, quoted in Lilomaiava-Doktor 2004, 40).

The social networks framework similarly focuses on ongoing linkages between country of origin and host country; however, social networks are “not necessarily dependent on diasporas, as defined by transnationalists” (Cassarino 2004, 10). In other words, common attributes of kinship and ethnicity as a basis for creating linkages can be deemphasized relative to individual initiative and agency.

As the last section and the next illustrate, the importance Samoans place on maintaining and reproducing their institutions of large descent groups, chieftainship, and Samoan concepts of *vā* and *malaga* points to the appropriateness of a transnational framework for examining return migration. Within this framework and taking into consideration indigenous concepts, the NELM and structural approaches also offer insights.

“Return” within Samoan Transnationalism

In 2005 I was surprised to find that Taituave John Hunkin and his wife and youngest daughter had moved “back” to American Samoa. While he had previously visited on several occasions, this time he had returned with the aim of resettling. He wished to reclaim his natal land and build houses for his children in America to come back to live in if they so desired, thus offering them an inheritance that he could not give them if he had remained in America. Fifteen years earlier, in California, Taituave had expressed a desire to return to Samoa, and now, after retirement from thirty years in a blue-collar job, he had made the move, not to independent Samoa where he held a title in his wife’s descent group, but to his natal village of Leone in Tutuila, American Samoa. This move involved reintegrating himself into the local village polity through induction into local matai titles, starting with a title that is also the name of the land he needed to reclaim. It also meant dealing with the politics of land claims and adapting to the slower pace of island life and different ways of doing things.

Return migration within the transnationalist framework is understandable as “part and parcel of a circular system of social and economic relationships and exchanges which facilitates the reintegration of migrants. . . . returnees prepare their reintegration at home through periodical and regular visits to their home countries. They retain strong links with their home countries and periodically send remittances to their households” (Cassarino 2004: 7–8). As such, return migration is best understood as part of the diasporic phenomenon, and sending remittances home to family members in the islands from the diaspora represents a strategy for “eventual return.” But while this may be true, it is not the whole story.

As Ping-Ann Addo reflects in her article on Tongan uses of money in the diaspora (Addo 2012 [this issue]), the practice of sending remittances home is part of a cultural responsibility in a kin-based system where one’s social identity is largely constituted through the sharing of resources and valuables. Although sending remittances and making occasional visits helps smooth the way for a “return,” they may not necessarily be practiced as an individual strategy. Instead these practices may more strongly articulate with cultural values, identity, and social obligations. The thematic emphasis that both Gmelch and Cassarino place on “success” or “failure” in their typologies of return becomes useful only once one takes into account the subjective elements of how success or failure are defined from an insider’s (Samoan) perspective.

Remitting cash home to family and matai, as a new form of the Samoan tradition of tautua (for which the sender is told they will receive many

blessings from God), may or may not be viewed by the migrant remitter as part of a strategy for their eventual return and reintegration in their country of origin, particularly since *tautua* is an important criterion for being selected to hold a *matai* title. Remittances can also be viewed as kin obligation, as hardship, and (as I have seen in several cases) as a response to emotional blackmail (e.g., “if you love your family, you’ll send the money”).

Every Samoan descent group holds at least one or two *matai* titles rooted in their home village. The Samoan tradition of *tautua* to *matai* and extended family in the form of labor and provisions of food and working together for the village under the collective authority of the council of chiefs are central criteria for selecting new *matai* titleholders. Other criteria include genealogical connections, personal character, and knowledge of family history and Samoan culture and traditions.

Becoming a *matai* brings with it a measure of honor, respect, and authority in the community, but with the raised status comes the obligation to serve the extended family, descent group, and community through leadership, as well as through one’s ability to secure and provide financial and other resources. While the center and home base of the descent group is a village in one of the islands of Samoa, many of its members may reside internationally, largely throughout the Pacific Rim—Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, Hawai‘i, and the West Coast of the United States.

The practice of Samoan emigrants remitting money to their relatives at home, particularly to help support the various home-based systems of reciprocity and exchange involved with life-crisis events and church and house dedications, has come to be seen as a new kind of *tautua* that can be rewarded with a *matai* title. Because only those titles bestowed according to custom in the village of the title’s origin are considered legal and valid in Samoa, receiving a title requires returning to the island for the investiture ceremony. This, in turn, requires large expenses of cash, traditional Samoan fine mats as well as other ceremonial valuables, and large quantities of food and livestock.

While Samoans in the United States contend with being part of a small cultural minority, a significant proportion of them do what they must to maintain their Samoan identity. Financial contributions to, and presence at, family and community events and expressions of *alofa* and *tautua* to the larger extended family are viewed as essential components of that identity. Commonly, the emotional and social costs of failing to make contributions outweigh whatever temporary economic difficulties may be incurred. For this reason *tautua* from afar is often described in terms of *alofa*.

In one case in my earlier Los Angeles-based fieldwork, a young man from a village in Savai'i arrived in California in 1987 together with the aumaga from his village on a fund-raising malaga. He reported that he had promised his father that he would return home with the malaga, but the malaga leader told him that he and all other unmarried members had to stay behind in California to look for jobs, to earn money to send home to their families and village. This was a better way to serve them, he was told. Having no relatives in California, he was adopted into another Samoan family, and eventually met and married a woman, also from Savai'i.

Economically surviving in the United States at lower-wage jobs was not easy, but the young man sent home what he could whenever he could, while he dreamed of returning home. During a research and filming trip to Savai'i, I visited his family and showed them a video of the young man and his family in the United States and delivered a package from them. I then filmed them speaking to him through the camera (a video letter). His father told him not to worry about having lots of money to return. He just wanted to have his son back. Yet, the son said, despite those words, it was impossible for him to think of returning with nothing to show for the many years he had spent away. Furthermore, he said, he had to have at least US\$3,000 (not a mandatory or set amount, but what he felt would be appropriate) for the village *usu* (the gathering of village matai and others to officially welcome and honor a returnee). Later, I learned that a number of villages in Samoa have chosen to ban the custom of *usu* for returnees because they acknowledged that for many it is a burden and deterrent to return. In this case, this young man returned only once, sadly, for the funeral of his father in 1997, ten years after he had left with the malaga.

Case Studies of Return to American Samoa

While statistics show that “foreigners” (mostly people from independent Samoa) have become a majority of American Samoa’s population, no statistics are available for the number of residents who hold the status of “returnees,” that is, residents who have lived for some period of time overseas (primarily in the United States) and returned with plans of making American Samoa their main residence. However, my general impressions and rough surveys suggested that a large number of American Samoan households contained at least one person who had spent a period of time in the United States and could be considered a returnee. It also appeared that the majority of returnees’ extended families lived in the United States, with a minority in American Samoa.

The following case studies of returnees are based on interviews with four men and three women. Two of the men are in their thirties. The other two, who are in their sixties, returned following retirement after many years working in the United States. The three females range in age from thirty-two to forty-nine. All interviewees except the youngest, a thirty-year-old man, have been or are married and have had children. The time they have been back in American Samoa ranges from two weeks to seven years. All were born in Tutuila except one, who was born in Upolu (independent Samoa). For the sake of anonymity I use pseudonyms for each of these case studies. Each case is presented as a life story, wherein I focus on the reasons and context for leaving American Samoa in the first place and what brought them back with plans to stay.

The central theme common to all of the cases, though in different ways, is a concern for the *'āiga* (family) and the need to take care of family members, secure family lands and titles, and perpetuate the family's place for the future within the home island and village. Family members, both in the Samoan islands and overseas, work closely together to take care of such needs. This theme is central to Samoan cultural identity.

Case 1

Tasi, age thirty, a first-born son, explained that he left American Samoa in 1984 at age five to live with his grandfather in the Mission District of San Francisco. His grandfather had a policy of having the first-born son of each of his sons come and live with him, since he wanted to have some of his grandchildren around; officially or unofficially adopting grandchildren is a common practice among Samoans. His mother had a hard time letting go, Tasi said, but his father, a math teacher at the local school, really wanted to fulfill his father's wishes, so his son went. The parents of other first-son cousins of his father's family were already living in the continental United States. Tasi stayed with his grandfather and male cousins from 1986 to 1988, after which he returned to live with his parents in American Samoa, where he attended second and third grades. He explained that his parents missed him and also wanted him to stay in touch "with his roots and where he comes from." He mentioned that even at a young age he was a bit of a problem child, and had gone to live for six months with his uncle in Washington, D.C., but that had not worked out so his uncle returned him to his grandfather in San Francisco. His father traveled to San Francisco to pick him up and bring him back to American Samoa.

Two years later Tasi went back to live with his grandfather, this time in Alameda County in the San Francisco Bay area. He described how he

became more and more affected by “*palagi* [white] culture” until at age thirteen he got into trouble with the law and was arrested. His father went to San Francisco to plea bargain with the judge. Rather than sending him to juvenile hall, he asked the judge to let him bring his son back to American Samoa where, being closer to his roots and the more disciplined aspects of Samoan culture, he would be rehabilitated. The plea bargain was accepted and Tasi returned with his father to American Samoa where he continued his schooling and graduated from high school in 1997, after which he enlisted in the U.S. military. He served for seven years, followed by five years of civilian work, before he decided to return to American Samoa to stay. He said he wanted to help his parents remodel their house and to attend the local community college.

Tasi’s case illustrates a recurrent theme of relying on culture and life in Samoa as a form of behavioral and cultural rehabilitation for youth. It is not unusual for Samoan families overseas to shuttle youth back to Samoa to stay with relatives in order to rehabilitate them through Samoan forms of discipline in the more strongly socially controlled village environment. Tasi said that his second trip back to American Samoa as a teenager was more difficult than his first, since he had picked up a lot of *palagi* habits and ways of doing things. “Other kids would speak to me in Samoan and I would speak back in English, and they would call me a *palagi*, but eventually I picked up my Samoan language and cultural understandings.”

Having just returned to American Samoa two weeks prior to the interview after an absence of twelve years, Tasi underscored the difference between voluntary and involuntary return:

This return feels a lot different than the first two. For one, this time it is my own choice. . . . And it’s permanent. Yes, I do have plans to travel, for example next year to New Zealand and Australia, but I plan this to be my home base. I decided to return because I felt like it had been long enough. I needed to get in touch with my family roots. I am here for my parents. I guess it comes with age. I have a bigger picture now. (October 15, 2009)

When I asked if there was any economic reason that pushed him to come back, he replied no, that he had a lot of “good options” in Hawai‘i where he had been working for the last four years after getting out of the military. Asked if he considered his case fairly typical, and whether he knew of a lot of cases similar to his, he said he did. About changes he found in American Samoa on his return, he said:

There are a lot of changes here since my last visit twelve years ago—more cars, more houses, more churches, more non-Samoan immigrants, businesses, McDonalds, and all the kids on cell phones. What is good for the economy and for people is all right with me, . . . but I am a little worried about our customs and traditions. For example, when I talked to my little cousins about making the *umu* [earth oven], they asked what that was. It's like they just want to go jump in the car and go to McDonalds. Now it's up to my generation to help instill the culture in the next generation. (October 15, 2009)

The flexible and open use of extended family to assist with child rearing at both ends of the migratory route is an important factor to consider in this system. It is also important to realize that, while Tasi's first two return trips were involuntary, they strongly influenced his voluntary choice to return later. Tasi said those trips helped him to maintain cultural and social connections. Informal adoption and child rearing by grandparents or other family members is a common occurrence in Samoan society, as will be seen in other cases discussed below.

Case 2

Sina, who is in her early forties, began with the story of her maternal great-grandmother, whom she took care of as a young woman in Faga'alu. Reflecting the cultural belief in Samoa that taking care of one's elders brings people good fortune, she said, "I believe my life has been blessed through caring for my great-grandma." Sina's maternal grandparents and all their children, with the exception of Sina's mother (who had been left behind to care for the great-grandmother), had migrated to the continental United States. Before Sina's great-grandmother passed away, her mother's brother came to Tutuila from San Diego for a visit. The great-grandmother let her wishes be known that on her death, Sina's maternal uncle in San Diego was to bring Sina to the United States to continue her education and "look for a better future." The great-grandmother died in 1981 when Sina was halfway through tenth grade. The uncle came back for the funeral and in fulfillment of the great-grandma's *mavaega* (dying wishes) took Sina back with him to San Diego, where he was serving in the U.S. Navy.

Sina completed high school in San Diego and went on to college there, working at the same time, and learning, she said, "to be independent." Her sister came to live with other relatives in Seattle and attend university there. Sina traveled from San Diego to Seattle to attend the wedding of her sister and ended up staying there. Her parents and other siblings moved

from American Samoa to Seattle. Sina met her husband, who is from Upolu, at a Samoan church in Seattle and they married in 1992. She recalled that when they married he told her his wish, that if they were blessed with children he would like to return to independent Samoa to raise the children so they could experience the Samoan way of life. In 1993 they visited Samoa, Sina's first visit back to the islands since she had left twelve years earlier.

In 1997, after she had two daughters, they moved to independent Samoa, where Sina's husband attended Piula Methodist Theological College. Sina told me that it had not been her desire to return to Samoa, in particular to independent Samoa because she is not from there, and that she did not place great value on her children experiencing the hardships of growing up the way her husband had. She said that living at the theological college was very challenging for her, something she had never experienced before. However, Sina said that she now gives her husband credit for his decision. She reported that her two high-school-age daughters are doing well at school and also know how to cook and clean the house: "I hardly have to do any of the housework." In contrast, she described how all of her sisters' and brothers' children born and raised in Seattle have become high-school dropouts and are involved in gang activities.

Sina's story resembles Tasi's in that Samoan culture was seen as having a positive influence on raising children, which provided a motivation for return. However, the difference is that in Sina's case the whole nuclear family unit made the move back, not just an individual child. Also, the decision was made by her husband that they should go to independent Samoa, not American Samoa, where youth experience a more Americanized (and more "cushioned") version of Samoan culture. If it were not for her husband, Sina said, she did not think she would ever have returned.

After the husband completed his four years at Piula Theological College, during which time their first son was born, the couple and their growing family went to live in Fale'ula, the compound where trained Methodist ministers and their families stay to await their postings as ministers, while working for the Methodist church at a weekly wage of \$100 *tala* (equivalent to about US\$30), which Sina said was very difficult. To help them survive, they were given a house, free utilities, and land on which to plant their crops. After they had lived there four years with no postings, Sina's mother, who lived in Seattle, became sick. Sina and her immediate family moved back there to take care of her, leaving the Methodist church. Then Sina's husband's mother passed away, and Sina and her husband made the decision to return to American Samoa, as opposed to independent Samoa, because wages there are higher, and school for children does not involve fees and follows the American system. Sina now has a good government job

and her husband is a Samoan culture teacher at a private school run by one of the churches in American Samoa. They are both strongly involved in working with youth groups at the local church in her village.

Case 3

Mele, a woman in her late thirties, returned to American Samoa with her husband three months before our interview. She explained that she, her husband, and children had left Washington state to go to Upolu to take care of her husband's mother when she became sick. They were not planning to stay. Her mother got better, but by that time Mele and her husband, who were both trained as ministers, received a call to start a church in his home village. At the time of the interview she was visiting her biological mother in Tutuila. Mele explained that her adoptive mother, her mother's sister, had taken her to live in Hawai'i and later Washington state when she was quite young. At first their children liked staying in the village in independent Samoa as a vacation, but once they started school and had to bear the discipline of corporal punishment practiced in the schools there they wanted to return to the United States.

Case 4

Pita was born in 1977 in Apia, independent Samoa. His mother is from independent Samoa, and his father is from Tutuila in American Samoa. His parents had met and married in Lā'ie, Hawai'i, where they attended the Church College of Hawai'i (now Brigham Young University Hawai'i) and worked at the Polynesian Cultural Center from 1967 to 1969. Later, his mother wished to return to Upolu to take care of her mother, but his father could not leave because he was working for the U.S. military, so she went on her own. This precipitated a separation and eventual divorce, and his mother eventually remarried.

In 1988, at age thirteen, Pita moved to American Samoa with his mother, stepfather, and three half-siblings. He continued his schooling there, eventually graduating from the community college in American Samoa and going off to California State Dominguez University in Southern California, where he completed his undergraduate degree. He then began a career working for Continental Airlines. Then his mother in American Samoa became sick with cancer; she took her three younger children to stay with her parents in independent Samoa and went to New Zealand to seek medical treatment, which was unsuccessful. Before passing away she let Pita know that she wanted him to take over the responsibility of raising his half-siblings.

Pita explained that he moved back to independent Samoa to fulfill his mother's wishes, seeing that his stepfather was not going to take full responsibility for the care of the children and was already moving on to another marriage. Pita said he moved to American Samoa to get a higher-paying job to support his half-siblings and planned to help them all complete their education. He was making a trip to independent Samoa every two weeks to look after them and brought some of them over to American Samoa to stay with him.

Case 5

Rosa was born in American Samoa, but after her mother separated from her father she went with her mother to live in Upolu, her mother's home island. Her mother remarried, and Rosa was cared for by her maternal grandmother in Upolu before migrating to Hawai'i with her mother and sister. While growing up in Hawai'i she remembered making four return visits to American Samoa and independent Samoa to visit relatives and participate in various family events. Fifteen years ago, her mother decided she would be happier living in American Samoa, even if material conditions of life would be poorer than in Hawai'i, so she moved back. Rosa explained that because her mother went back to American Samoa, she decided to move back to help her. She intended to do so after she had gathered sufficient resources by taking a good job in Hawai'i and working for several years. However, she graduated from university with a master's degree in December 2008, just when the recession hit. Between December 2008 and July 2009, she applied for thirteen different jobs without success. As a single mother who needed to support three children, as well as to remit money home to her mother, she realized her best choice would be to return to American Samoa, even without much saved capital, as she (rightly) predicted that finding a decent job in American Samoa during the recession would be easier. Rosa's return was the only one of the seven cases in which the 2008 global economic downturn played a direct role, but only in terms of timing, since she already had in mind to return to be closer to her mother.

Case 6

Eli was born in the mid-1940s, shortly after World War II when both Samoas, but more particularly American Samoa, were engulfed by thousands of U.S. Marines who were stationed in the islands. The strong U.S. presence introduced an unprecedented amount of money and a taste for the material items money can buy. After the departure of the military, the economy of

American Samoa went into a slump. Eli was just coming of age at this time, when the mass out-migration wave was beginning. As a teenager he found a way to migrate to Hawai'i and then to Southern California, where kin provided a home and he received training to become a technical advisor and welder at a major oil refinery.

He married a non-Samoan, he said, in part to reduce the burdens of *fa'alavelave* (Samoan life-crisis events), which involve large contributions and exchanges of money and valuables. Eli, however, did regularly remit money to his family in Tutuila to invest in the family estate, particularly in the construction of new buildings, as well as to support *fa'alavelave*. The estate belonged to his mother's descent group. His father, who was from the relatively remote eastern islands of Manu'a, had come to live with his wife's family, and eventually a title was bestowed on him, even though he was an in-law, because his service, love, and devotion to his wife's family was so strong.

Eli gained skills as a mechanical engineer and had a long career working for Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). By all measures his return to Samoa was a success. His father, who was the last *sa'o* (head chief) of his descent group, passed away in 1992, near the time of Eli's retirement from ARCO. Eli had already come home to receive a traditional Samoan *tatau*, the Samoan male knee-to-waist tattoo. Through his long-term *tautua*, mostly performed from overseas, and because of his return, Eli was selected by the descent group to succeed to the *sa'o* title. Subsequently, he rebuilt the descent group's guesthouse, then the village church (with the support of the whole community), and subsequently became the village mayor. In this village he is one of only two landholding chiefs. However, the other *matai* title is still vacant. Besides retirement benefits, Eli also receives substantial income from the rental or lease of lands or houses used by foreign businesses, such as a Chinese restaurant in the village, which is not far from the commercial and governmental centers of American Samoa. In this case, the importance of taking up the head *sa'o matai* title of the descent group figured strongly in his motivation to resettle in American Samoa following retirement from a long career overseas, during which he remitted funds and served the family in Samoa in other ways. During his absence, others maintained the family estate.

Case 7

Iakopo's situation differed somewhat from the others considered here. His grandfather had been head chief of a large descent group and had purchased land in the adjacent village from a chief there. Thus, in addition

to the communal lands associated with his chiefly title, he had approximately 20 acres (8 ha) of individually owned land on which he instructed Iakopo's father and his household of six children to live and raise their crops. Iakopo's father was poor, lacked formal Western education, and was a *taule'ale'a* (untitled man). His father died when Iakopo was not yet fifteen years old, so Iakopo dropped out of school to seek employment to help his family financially, deferring his own education. He boarded a ship to Hawai'i, where he arrived not knowing anyone, and found work within a few days, despite not knowing much English. Eventually, he ended up working in Long Beach, California, and saved enough money to bring his mother and siblings from Tutuila to join him. This is the main point of difference with Eli's story; Eli simply sent money home to be invested in the family estate, whereas Iakopo used his earnings to bring his family to the United States, effectively abandoning the family land.

Iakopo also returned to American Samoa after his retirement but with fewer savings and benefits from his career of more than thirty years in the United States. He said he spent many of the years in the United States in *tautua* to his wife's family in Savai'i. In fact, to honor his *tautua* and show of love to her family and his successful adaptation to life in the United States (e.g., he owned a house), the family there had bestowed on him an important title. This title was subdivided between various branches of the descent group, and other holders of the title continued to reside in the village in Savai'i, representing the descent group in the village council. Iakopo said that part of the reason for his decision to accept the title—which involved traveling to Savai'i and paying for the expensive feasting and gifting to the village in exchange for their acceptance of him as a title holder of the village—was access to land. He felt that taking the title would help secure land for his children when he passed away. In fact, the communal and collective ownership of land in the system would ensure they would have rights to live on that land if they so chose, though the chances of his grown children, born and raised in the United States, settling in a remote village on Savai'i may seem slim.

Land also was a strong factor in the decision of Iakopo and his wife to return and resettle in American Samoa after Iakopo's retirement. The land that his grandfather had bought was still there, though others had assumed some measure of *pule* (control) over it. Since all his siblings had moved away, the estate was not kept up, and control (if not a sense of ownership) had been somewhat lost. Iakopo's sister had also expressed a desire to return to American Samoa and build a house on that land. She had gone to the current *sa'o* of the descent group (who is not a relative), but had no success in securing rights to the land, since he was strategically maintaining

relationships with others who had an interest in it. Iakopo realized he needed to return to secure the land, not only for his sister but also for his children, since he had no property or land to leave them in the United States. The case is somewhat further complicated by the fact that, according to Iakopo, the land had been given by his grandfather to his father and is individually owned; thus it should be passed only directly to his children. However, when the grandfather bought it in 1919, he registered the land at the American Samoa Territorial Registrar using his chiefly name, which resulted in the mistaken interpretation of the land being communal land. Thus, use of the land was deferred to the current sa'ō holder despite the fact that he is not related by blood to the chief who bought the land for his own children.

When Iakopo returned he first lived at the house of his niece, then pitched a tent on his land and planted crops, mostly taro, bananas, and breadfruit. His wife arrived with their youngest, school-age daughter, and they built a shack. In an effort to make claims to the land on which he was born and raised, he first went to the sa'ō in the adjacent village and took a minor title with the same name as the land itself. He said that this was strategic in helping him secure rights to the land. His sister came from Seattle and also built a house on the land. His son came for several months, but Iakopo sent him back to the United States for fear that his son would exacerbate the conflict with the other person making a claim to the land. Iakopo wants to use the court system to sort out this conflict. He showed me a letter written by the other claimant referring to his labor of "sweat on the land cutting the trees down" over the years when Iakopo was not to be seen, which he presented as evidence of his ownership through usufruct. Iakopo's daughter, who was born and grew up in the continental United States, then moved to American Samoa with her two young children after separating from her Samoan-American husband, who was serving time in prison. Eventually, Iakopo was able to build a more substantial house for the family and is now in the process of building another one, which he proudly says he is doing for his children using his retirement pensions without incurring debt from a bank loan.

In 2007 the sa'ō of the descent group passed away, and meetings were held among the various branches of the descent group regarding whom they wished to put forward as their candidate for the position. Iakopo says he could have been considered as a potential candidate, and others had urged him to pursue the title. However, he chose instead to seek a lower-ranking, but associated, *tulāfale* (orator) title, which was previously held by his cousin who passed away the previous year. This title is higher ranking in the village than his previous title and one that works closely with the

holder of the sa'ō title. It was also less contentiously sought after than the sa'ō title, for which there would have been dozens of contenders from various branches of the family. If the title had been in independent Samoa, the probable solution would have been subdivision. Iakopo followed formal procedures for obtaining a matai title, starting with registering his name for the title at the Territorial Registrar's office, followed by published announcements in the local newspaper for ninety days. With no objections, plans went forward for the installation ceremony in the village, involving the amassing of fine mats, cash, food, and ceremonial gifts to be distributed to the other chiefs of the village on the special day. Iakopo explained that receiving this title would give him more power vis-à-vis his land case, which he said was an important motive for taking the title, in addition to gaining recognition, status, and a role within the community.

When I asked Iakopo about his title from his wife's family in independent Samoa, he told me he has put that aside and is not that interested in it anymore. He spent many years serving his wife's family but now is investing in his own family (meaning descent group), which he was not so involved with during his many years in the United States. Perhaps he is even somewhat regretful about the former focus of his energies, considering that they do not now appear to be strategic to his current aims in American Samoa.

Iakopo told me that six months after he first returned to American Samoa he almost went back to the United States, because he was no longer used to the slow pace of life, nor did he enjoy the political problems he faced reclaiming his family land. Since his return in 2000, his wife has made many trips back and forth to the United States visiting children and grandchildren, but he told me he does not want to leave until after the land case is settled. In contrast, Eli informed me that he takes a cruise with his wife at least once a year—one year it was South America, the next year Alaska. His position and land is secured, his reincorporation smoother and economically more successful than Iakopo's, mainly because his family estate was maintained throughout his absence from American Samoa, and his tautua was invested throughout his time abroad in that estate, preparing for his eventual return.

Iakopo invested his resources by bringing his family to the United States. His transnational links with his home community in American Samoa were thereby weakened, and the family lands were taken over by others while he performed tautua and sought status, respect, and land for his children in Savai'i. It was not until rather late in the process that he realized the need to resecure his relationships within his own descent group and reclaim the family land, which he has done, but with much more difficulty than in

Eli's case (see Howard and Rensel 2012 [this issue] regarding land issues involving returnees on Rotuma; see also Lieber et al. 2012 [this issue] regarding the importance of genealogical knowledge for pressing land claims).

Case Study Themes

These preliminary case studies and interviews reveal that American Samoans who returned to their home islands after years living in America did so for different reasons associated with different age groups, including (1) youths who were sent back for disciplinary reasons or to benefit from exposure to their cultural roots; (2) young to middle-aged adults who came back either to expose their children to Samoan culture or to care for elders or children; and (3) retirees, particularly male retirees, who returned to take matai titles or to secure land for themselves and their families that they could pass on to their children. For youths the return was usually involuntary; adult family members made the decisions, although in some cases (that of Tasi, for example), being sent back led to a voluntary return later on. Sharing responsibility for child rearing is an important part of this Samoan youth mobility pattern. An important factor for adults is the ability to return with enough capital to start a business, build new residential houses or guesthouses for the descent group, and support community activities.

Caring for one's parents and other elders is a central theme in Samoan culture, providing an impetus for movement in either direction, but this factor plays a particularly important role in the young adult to middle-aged bracket. It also appears that when caring for an elderly person is the primary reason for return, the concern to invest in family and community development may become secondary. Underpinning the Samoan practice of *tausi matua* (caring for elderly people) is the belief that one receives *fa'amanuiaga* (special blessings) in return. That theme was particularly expressed by female interviewees in my study, whereas among the male interviewees, particularly the retirees, the idea of *tautua* leading to a title was somewhat stronger. However, throughout all the case studies, the overriding theme was the Samoan value of family and community obligations.

The case studies demonstrated the applicability of the transnational model for understanding return migration to American Samoa, but not to the exclusion of other analytical perspectives such as the structural and the neoclassical or NELM frameworks. Returnees in the cases summarized here had varied types of overseas experience, with various levels of "success"; that is, return was not clearly a sign of either a successful or failed overseas migration experience, as the neoclassical or NELM approach

might define. Some returnees successfully reached their overseas migration goals, such as higher education, better employment, and purchase of a home (the “American Dream”), but if they have throughout this time maintained their input and service to the descent group at home, they still returned to take up the larger interests of their descent groups and village, often in a leadership position. Others might return only after pursuing higher education with a desire to contribute their skills in the American Samoan workforce, though the desire to contribute (and *tautua*) to community may sometimes override the desire to return, since salaries are generally lower in American Samoa than in the United States.

The two cases of return after successful careers abroad (Eli and Iakopo) reveal interesting similarities and contrasts. The maintenance of transnational kinship linkages between family in American Samoa and the United States during the tenure of residence abroad was stronger for Eli, in part because the household maintained its estate in American Samoa. The maintenance of these linkages assisted Eli’s reintegration into his community on his return, making it relatively successful. In contrast, Iakopo’s whole immediate family migrated to the United States, leaving the family land vacant. This motivated Iakopo’s eventual return to reclaim the family land but also made his reincorporation and reestablishment of identity and status in American Samoa more difficult. Iakopo spent many years in the United States serving his in-laws’ descent group in independent Samoa, which would have helped facilitate his and his wife’s return there but did not assist their return to American Samoa.

Contrasting “Return” in American Samoa and Independent Samoa

Despite their low per capita income compared with the average in the United States, American Samoans are more affluent in cash than their counterparts in independent Samoa. Average salaries and wages in American Samoa are much higher than in independent Samoa, while welfare benefits are readily available to the unemployed. In addition, imported goods and foods are generally less expensive than the same items in stores in independent Samoa. Furthermore, the government of American Samoa funds free breakfast and lunch for students at all schools, whereas no such program exists in independent Samoa. These factors mean that, in general, American Samoans in American Samoa are less reliant on remittances from overseas relatives. These conditions also make American Samoa a target destination for citizens of independent Samoa, particularly for those who do not wish to migrate too far from home for employment purposes.

These economic differences between American and independent Samoa have implications for social life, attitudes, and institutions related to return

migration, even though they share the same basic cultural traditions, values, and institutions. For example, I noticed subtle differences between the two Samoas in cultural attitudes about living overseas. I have often heard residents of independent Samoa use the word *tafao* to summarize their or others' overseas experience, whether that experience was for two weeks visiting some relatives or ten years going to school and holding a job. *Tafao* means "1. Roam, wander about. 2. Be idle, or 3. Stroll about or wander" (Milner 1966, 226), and is just as readily used to refer to taking a stroll at night through the village as taking a trip overseas. The noun form, *tafaoga*, is a term used to refer to a picnic. So going overseas, no matter what one does there or how busy and grueling one's life there may be, is still considered tafao, comparable in some ways to going on a picnic—an enjoyable experience away, after which one returns home. From this perspective the real, valuable work is done by those who stay home, no matter how idle or busy they may be, taking care of and upholding family lands, titles, houses, properties, and positions within the community.

The ability of those who leave to remit money home to support family, church, and village activities, and to come home with capital to invest in various status-building projects, offers a redeeming value for their absence. No matter where one is, the principle of helping one's *āiga*, immediate and extended, is the expected and valued practice, particularly for those who remain at home. If migrants return without wealth to share with the extended family, they are still likely to be accepted and reincorporated into the family and village, but not without stigma. From the local perspective, their time overseas is often seen as wasted. While this view was strongly expressed by many in independent Samoa, it was not a common perspective among American Samoans I interviewed. Samoans who have experienced life in both places generally acknowledged this difference.

Given this attitude, a lack of money can operate as a deterrent to returning to independent Samoa, even for a visit, no matter how strong the desire to return to the home village. The village custom of *usu* is an additional economic burden, since the honor is expected to be repaid through a distribution of cash beyond family obligations. I would suggest that, on average, Samoans in the diaspora from independent Samoa may experience greater cultural, social, and economic pressures than those from American Samoa.

Differences in government policy between American and independent Samoa in relation to the matai system also affect return migration and lend themselves to a structural type of analysis. The basic structure of the institution of the matai system, as previously described, remains the same between the two Samoas. However, the government in independent Samoa

permits multiple simultaneous registrations of different people to the same matai title. Consequently, many independent Samoan matai titles now have many multiple holders, since families have subdivided their titles. Only a few paramount titles, such as Malietoa, are restricted from being subdivided. Individuals are also allowed to hold more than one title, and consequently many matai hold several titles, such as in their mother's father's descent group, father's father's descent group, through their spouse, and so forth. This policy encourages expatriates to make return visits in order to receive titles in ceremonies that include large distributions of money and valuables, and then go back overseas, where they are now even more committed (and obligated) to continue to support the system with financial and other resources.

American Samoa, in contrast, prohibits subdivision of matai titles. Each title may be registered to only one person at a time. Furthermore, any individual may register only one title at a time. Thus, if a person who already holds a title is to receive a new one, the old title must first be removed. A vacant title may be bestowed on an individual only after consensus has been reached in the descent group or a title has been won in court. Since there is only one holder of the title, it is a requirement that the title holder reside on island, and preferably in the village near to the guesthouse associated with the title, thereby representing the descent group in the village, acting as trustee for descent group lands, and promoting descent group unity and prestige in the community. Thus, the matai system in American Samoa encourages return migration with a permanent resettlement. In contrast, in independent Samoa, the matai system practice encourages new matai to go back overseas and support the system from there, since there are already other, local holders of the same title in the village representing the descent group in the village and acting as custodian of the descent group's communal lands.

Conclusion

The Samoan proverb "E lele le toloa ae toe ma'au i le vai" that serves as an epigraph at the beginning of this essay expresses an important cultural value and sentiment—that it is important to return home. People leave seeking "greener pastures" for securing their own and their children's future as well as improving their family's standard of living at home. While the majority of Samoans who migrated from American Samoa since the early 1950s have not returned permanently to American Samoa, a small percentage of them have done so.

Because the population of American Samoans living on island is very small relative to those living off island, the percentage of island residents who are returnees is relatively large. My limited survey of households with at least one parent or a household head of American Samoan ancestry indicates that the majority of these households contain individuals who have had overseas experience, primarily in the United States. Nonetheless, the small land size of American Samoa and its limited employment opportunities relative to the American Samoans living off island and their social and economic aspirations means that most American Samoan migrants do not return permanently at any point in their lives. Yet Samoa remains a home in the mind of many, a place to which one can always return and live more or less “free” on family land, that is, without paying mortgages or rent.

The purpose of this essay has been to explore the phenomenon of return migration to American Samoa through case studies using analytical frameworks developed for researching such phenomena. A major point is that an understanding of indigenous concepts, institutions, and practices must be incorporated into any analysis for it to be credible. While the transnational framework is germane for understanding Samoan mobility, the NELM and structural forms of analysis provide additional insights.

Analysis of mobility must include considerations of cultural identity, social relationships, and membership in extended family networks that entail major economic and social obligations. Motivating factors for migration or return migration must be assessed not just at the individual level of the migrant but also at the larger household or extended family levels (a point of the NELM framework). In fact, decisions about who goes where and who stays or leaves may often be largely influenced by, if not completely in the hands of, the matai (chiefly titleholder) of the extended family, whether that matai is based in Samoa or overseas. This point depends somewhat on the migrant’s age and status and his or her relationship to the matai.

While the literature on Pacific Islanders’ migratory and diasporic experiences is expanding, particularly with regard to original out-migration and back-and-forth visiting, the specific subtopic of return migration remains understudied. This preliminary research on return migration to American Samoa, focusing on motivations for return, draws attention to some of the issues involved. More data and interviews are needed, and related subtopics and issues, such as the impact of returnees on the home-island community and culture, also require examination. Comparative research involving the role of indigenous concepts in patterning return migration should be particularly illuminating.

NOTES

This project grew out of my previous research and film documentary on Samoan transnationalism (Van der Ryn 1991a, 1991b), and meeting up with Samoan friends made during that study in Los Angeles, who had returned to reestablish themselves in American Samoa after many years living in the United States.

1. It is common practice among American Samoans to drop the word “American” when referring to their home islands. However, the independent country of Western Samoa officially changed its name to “Samoa” in 1997. In this essay, I refer to the latter as “independent Samoa” to avoid confusion.

2. According to Unasa Va’a: “Where the mass migration from American Samoa in the early 1950s was an attempt by the U.S. Navy to take care of its own dependents, migration from Western Samoa in the period just before independence [from New Zealand] in 1962, ten years later, and subsequently, must be seen as a colonial attempt at reconciliation with its former colony” (1995, 7).

3. While malaga occurred from both American Samoa and independent Samoa, the use of malaga for raising money for community projects such as a village school would exclusively occur from a village of financially much poorer independent Samoa, where villages are responsible for building their schools, unlike U.S.-subsidized American Samoa, where the government funds construction of all educational and medical facilities (though of course not church buildings, halls, or pastor’s residences).

REFERENCES

Addo, Ping-Ann

- 2012 Teaching culture with a modern valuable: Lessons about money for and from Tongan youth in New Zealand. *Pacific Studies* 35 (1/2): 11–43.

Cassarino, Jean-Pierre

- 2004 Theorising return migration: A revisited conceptual approach to return migrants. EUI Working Paper RSCAS 2004/02, Mediterranean Program, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy: European Univ. Institute.

Glick Schiller, Nina, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton-Blanc

- 1995 From immigrant to transmigrant: Theorizing transnational migration. *Anthropology Quarterly* 68 (1): 48–63.

Gmelch, George

- 1980 Return migration. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9:135–59.

Howard, Alan, and Jan Rensel

- 2012 Issues of concern to Rotumans abroad: A view from the Rotuma Website. *Pacific Studies* 35 (1/2): 144–83.

Jackson, Bryan

- 2009 *Immigration and population growth in the territory of American Samoa from 1980 to 2008, analysis and trends*. Pago Pago: Planning Division, Department of Commerce, Government of American Samoa.

Janes, Craig

- 2002 From village to city: Samoan migration to California. In *Pacific diaspora: Island peoples in the United States and across the Pacific*, ed. Paul Spickard, Joanne L. Rondilla, and Debbie Hippolite Wright, 118–32. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press.

Keohane, Robert O., and Joseph S. Nye Jr.

- 1970 *Transnational relations and world politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press.

Lieber, Michael, Willys Peters, Rosita Peters, Mike Borong

- 2012 Kapingamarangi people in the United States. *Pacific Studies* 35 (1/2): 232–51.

Lilomaiava-Doktor, Sa'iliemanu

- 2004 Fa'a-Samoa and population movement from inside out: The case of Saleologa, Savaii. PhD diss., Univ. of Hawai'i at Mānoa.
2009 Beyond "Migration": Samoan population movement (*Malaga*) and the geography of social space (*Vā*). *The Contemporary Pacific* 21:1–32.

Milner, G. B.

- 1966 *Samoan dictionary: Samoan–English, English–Samoan*. London: Oxford Univ. Press.

Va'a, Unasa

- 1995 Searching for the good life: Samoan international migration. PDF online at <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/EROPA/UNPAN019859.pdf>.

Van der Ryn, Micah

- 1991a *A chief in two worlds*. Documentary video, 52 minutes. Produced by Center for Visual Anthropology, Univ. of Southern California.
1991b The matai system: A transnational study of Samoa's indigenous system of leadership, status, and prestige and its role within the lives and communities of Samoans in South Central Los Angeles. MA thesis, Anthropology, Univ. of Southern California, Los Angeles.

Wallerstein, Immanuel

- 1974 *Capitalist agriculture and the origins of the European world-economy in the sixteenth century*. Vol. 1 of *The modern world-system*. New York: Academic Press.