

WOMEN MATAI (CHIEFS): NAVIGATING AND NEGOTIATING THE PARADOX OF BOUNDARIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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THIS PAPER EXAMINES Samoan conception of gender roles and transformations examining women's status and situation in light of ideological changes regarding gender relations and expectations in contemporary Samoa. I situate my paper in Samoan ways of knowing regarding gender roles and norms and draw on feminist (Trask 1984) works to provide guiding light for the cross cultural use of feminist theory to Samoan concepts of feagaiga, fa'a-matai (chieftainship system), and gender equality. I study women's roles especially as they take on matai titles and examine what gains have been made and the dynamics involved for matai in the masculine (read: public sphere) of political authority not only in villages but also in government and parliamentary institutions. Concomitantly, as the cultural fabric of Samoan life has been influenced by transnational migration, I examine these transnational dynamics and evaluate how they affect women both at home and in the Samoan diaspora. I have decided not to italicized Samoan words, as Samoan is our official language together with English.

Any discussion of gender roles in and of Samoa is incomplete without providing the social structure in which gender manners of thinking are situated. This provides context for the debates about the uniqueness and viability of Polynesian women power in its own right that this session hopes to illuminate. I also argue the dichotomy of private/public, domestic/public dominant in gender and development discourses is too simplistic to study the complexity of gender relations, ideologies, and the diverse range of indigenous agency that articulates with the processes of colonialism, Christianity, and late capitalism.

The dichotomy is problematic because many Samoan women still prefer to work with what is called in the Euro-American tradition, “private sphere.” Anela and Sina (interviewees) pointed out for Samoa “the domestic and public spheres are not easily separable.”

The next section outlines village social structures in Samoa and the interactive relationships within them, then I briefly discuss the historical transformations in feagaiga, fa’a-matai, and gender roles and explore the significance of this more deeply. I then discuss the interviews of several women from rural Savaii and urban Apia, as well as educated adolescents from the National University of Samoa, regarding their views on women and economy and the status of women; I also interviewed the CEO of an Elections Commission Board to elicit information on women’s status in the political and parliamentary arena, after which I analyze associated ideas to demonstrate the advances made on gender and women specifically. In the next section, I discuss procedures of matai conferment, a key fa’alavelave (cultural event) in Samoa and fa’a-matai (chieftainship system). I provide examples of two case studies and an analysis of the numbers of matai bestowed, women and men, place of residence, and other factors. In delineating these, I argue although Samoans would like to think of their chieftainship as timeless, it nevertheless has changed to adapt to modern socioeconomic conditions. Like the matai bestowal of titles in fafo (abroad) to overseas kin in the last three decades, the recent matai conferment at iinei (Samoa and local) is examined to demonstrate current changes in fa’a-matai chieftainship system, gender, and tautua activities.

Within a nu’u village, five basic societal groups can be found to constitute the “sociometric wheel” of fa’a-matai (matai system) interacting in a social system performing economic, political, and social functions (Figure). The groups are the tama’ita’i or aualuma (daughters of matai), faletua ma tausii (wives of matai), ‘aumaga or taulele’a (sons of matai), tamaiti (young children), and the matai council. These groups function as interdependent organs of the village, each with its designated tasks in the process of government and the provision of goods and services. The village hierarchy is prescribed in village fa’alupega (honorifics and traditional salutations and address) that describes chiefs and orators’ position, their roles, and their functions in the social hierarchies of Samoan villages. Thus the social status and position of all four village groups, aualuma, ‘aumaga, tamaiti, and faletua ma tausii, depend on the family matai’s status in the village fa’alupega. It is important to know that while these categories seem stable and unchanging as depicted in the literature, these are fluid and dynamic. Merely describing the different structures runs the risk of overstating a case for structure and does not help us understand the relationships, the dynamics, ambiguities, power relations, and tensions involved.

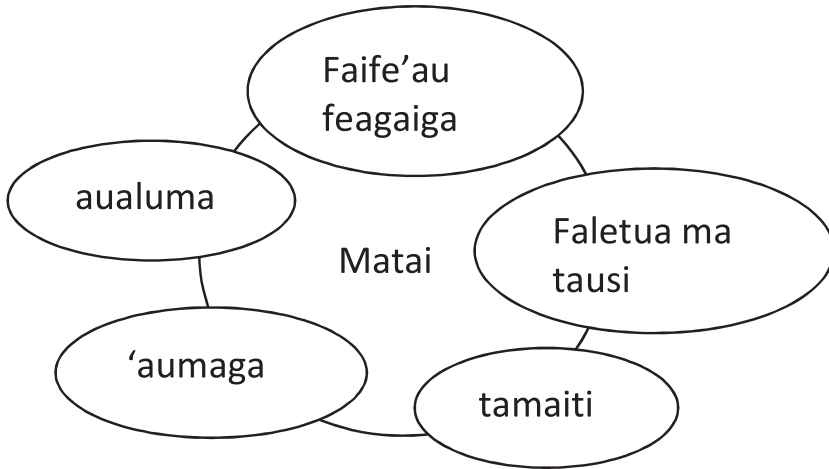


FIGURE. Sociometric Wheel. Adapted from Aifono Le Tagaloa (1992)

The tama'ita'i or aualuma group contains the daughters of matai who reside locally and are no longer at school, unmarried, or widowed. They are the fa'ioa "producers" (they manufacture traditional wealth like mats, fine-mats, and tapa cloth). Other roles of tama'ita'i include being peacemakers and mediators over disputes, not only in families but in the village. It is through the aualuma (the same could be said of 'aumaga) that young women are taught these activities, grooming them for their future roles. Although this is the received understanding, more and more young women work in some form of paid employment, and, in the case of Salelologa, unmarried tama'ita'i are spending fewer hours in weaving mats or fine-mats in aualuma.

As the wives of matai, faletua ma tausi comprise mainly foreigners, since village practices discourage endogamous marriages (although village practices are not always successful in preventing this). The nature of their affiliations, through marriages, lessens direct participation by this group, but as wives and mothers of tama'ita'i, 'aumaga and tamaiti they play an important consultative and advisory role as spouses and matriarchs. The institutional structure of faletua ma tausi basically follows that of the village as declared in fa'alupega (honorifics and traditional address and salutation). In old Samoa the two groups tama'ita'i and aualuma and faletua ma tausi had separate and clearly defined roles. However, over time these two groups in most villages as in Salelologa operate as the women's committee, performing health and instructive functions.¹

The 'aumaga, sons of matai, also the malosi o le nu'u (the strength of the village) are the untitled men who are no longer attending school. The 'aumaga

is the labor force and consists of producers of agricultural and other foodstuffs required by the village. The strength and power, *malosi*, of a village is invariably determined by the capacity and courage of this group. With the *matai*, they comprise the body for policing during curfew times in the evening, during times of prayer before dinner, and later after ten for bedtime. Like the *tama'ita'i*, *faletua ma tausi*, 'aumaga hierarchy is again dependent on that of the village.

The *tamaiti*, or infants and children who are too young to be in *tama'ita'i* group if female or in the 'aumaga group if male, comprises the final section of village population, with the bulk of its membership being at school. This category does not operate as a group but is recognized as a group with rights and responsibilities. As descendants of *matai*, they inherit rights to utilize family land and to be holders of *matai*. They are otherwise the errand element of the village work force.²

A new group that has been integrated into this social organization is the *faife'au* (the clergy people in villages). The church has been integrated into *fa'a-Samoa*, and this group is referred to as *feagaiga* (polite address for *faife'au*), but *feagaiga* is a literal term reserved for brother-sister relationship as discussed at length in anthropological studies of Samoa (Schoeffel 1978). This special relationship prescribes that brothers had an obligation to consider the interests of their sisters and their sisters' children. Culturally, the sisters help keep peace and harmony of *aiga* through their advisory role as sisters and as mothers to their children. Le Tagaloa (1992) argues that the ability of *fa'a-matai* to incorporate a new group *faife'au* (missionary servant) into the system in the early nineteenth century is a testimony to the malleability of *fa'a-matai*. The new group was placed not as *faife'au* (servant) but as *fa'afeagaiga*, which resembles the *tama'ita'i* of family and village. The missionary was given maximum protection, privileges, and rights of *tama'ita'i* in the eyes of *fa'a-matai*, a group with similar responsibilities as the *tama'ita'i*.

The leading group in village government is the *matai* council or assembly of *matai* (consisting of chiefs and orators). The *matai* council is the governing authority, which exercises the powers necessary to regulate the daily lives of its inhabitants according to established practices and conventions. The *matai* council is the village legislature that makes laws and regulations. It also makes executive decisions on village government, which are carried out in accordance with its instructions. Villagers who act in contravention of village laws are dealt with by the assembly in a manner it considers fit and proper. Legislative, executive, and judicial functions are carried out by the village council as an undifferentiated process (Va'ai 1999). In carrying out the various functions of government, however, the essential procedure in determining issues and problems is *soalau-pule* (the balancing of authority) with *tofa ma le fa'autaga* (profound wisdom

and fairness). Procedures may vary, but the essential requirement is the discussion of issues before decisions are made.

The work of Penelope Schoeffel (1995) examines the cultural transformation and persistence of Samoan gendered statuses and associated ideologies of religion and kinship. She describes the historical transformation of “feagaiga” from a covenant between brother and sister to the traditional idea of feagaiga, with sacred sister power in the pre-Christian era, while the mana spiritual aspects attributed to female heirs, especially since chiefly status has largely ceased. As Le Tagaloa (1992) noted, the malleability of fa’a-matai with the creation of a new category fa’afeagaiga (polite term for clergy, minister or pastor, and caring relationship) was the beginning of the erosion of feagaiga as it was traditionally conceived. The feagaiga that is practiced today is through formal exchanges during fa’alavelave (funeral, matai investiture, wedding), where family support and reciprocal exchanges transpire. Schoeffel showed, “the concept of feagaiga provided (and to some extent still provides), a metaphorical foundation for the ideological structure by which order is maintained in Samoan society” (1995, 85).

A recent study by Latu Latai confirmed Schoeffel’s observations. He writes,

The role of women in pre-Christian Samoa as feagaiga held important status that gave them superior power and encompassing role over their brothers . . . has important role in maintaining a state of aptness and harmony within Samoan society both within the family and village as a whole (2016, 51).

Latai studied the Samoan pastor, feagaiga, and pastor’s wives new status and the continuing transformation of gender ideologies where the “sacred sister” was replaced by “sacred pastor.” One cataclysmic change in gender relations regarding tama’ita’i as in aualuma and faletua ma tausi (women married in or in-laws) occurred as a result of the combination of these groups that had separate roles and functions but shared complementary responsibilities not only among themselves but also with the men groups (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1991, 2001). When the aualuma and faletua ma tausi were combined in komiti tumāmā (sanitation committee) during New Zealand’s administration in the 1920s to assist with village health and sanitation efforts, it further eroded the mana (spiritual, and respect status of aualuma, sisters, and women in general) argued Schoeffel (1995).³ In her study of Nu’u o Teine (Women Village Government) of Saolufata, Simanu-Klutz (2011) described similar transformations in Saolufata. Thus, the increasing secularization of female roles has resulted in increased gender inequality. In the matai, men generally view women’s responsibilities as an extension of the wifely duties of caring for families,

which is considered private and peripheral (relative to men's work), compared to when komiti work, which is viewed through the tama'ita'i and ali'i organizations of villages that work together in a "shared responsibility" caring for families, villages, and districts.

Women and Economy: Education, Services, and Politics

To gauge village women's views of their experiences, I conducted interviews between June and July 2017. Interviews in Savaii June 2017 regarding views on women's role and mataihip in contemporary Samoa offered consistent understandings of gender roles based on Samoan customs and usage and social hierarchy as prescribed in fa'alupega (village honorifics).⁴ The proverb, "E sui faiga ae le sui faavae" (The material form changes but the structural foundations remain) came up many times. Ake Elia is a tama'ita'i female and sixty-four-year-old grandmother in Savaii and lives at her natal homeplace but also spends time at her husband's home, which is within walking distance. When I asked her about her thoughts on women's work and responsibilities she responded:

AE: There is quite a lot of changes, yes . . . but personally as the saying, "E sui faiga ae lē suia faavae" [Material things change but foundations remain]. Us daughters, female and mothers look after the children, take care of home and household, take the kids to school, weave mats, prepare food and advise husbands, and/or brothers with family affairs. But our brothers, husbands and fathers they tend to plantations, deal with heavy work and attend to church and village affairs you know!

When I asked Ake about matai being bestowed on females, she acknowledged that women can be matai but we should defer to our male kin first, when there are none, then of course a female can take it. Ake can be seen as traditional, but is quite progressive in terms of what females can do and also defers to traditional roles of sister and brother relationship and, foremost, wants harmony in family and village life. Bundled in the above response is the assumption that men bring money to the family and women maintain the welfare of the household by caring for the young children and earning extra revenue from her mats and handicrafts when she can.

Anela Feleti, thirty-one, is a high school teacher in Palauli village in Savaii; she obtained her Teaching Diploma from the National University of Samoa (NUS) in 2009 and lives with her parents and siblings. She is single and the main financial supporter for her parents. When I asked Anela about her views on women's roles and responsibilities she responded:

AF: Well, our *aganu'u* (Samoan culture) describes everyone's position and role as in village social structure, the *fa'alupega* (honorifics) prescribes matai's status and this is how we know our social location within the *nu'u* (village) and role expectancy. There are changes but these are done within the limits of *aganu'u*, like "E sui faiga ae le suia faavae." While female traditional roles as *fai'oa* (weaving mats, fine-mats, *siapo* and handicrafts) is true today, more and more women seek employment in formal and informal labor markets. There are also those who don't work at all but look after the children and care for the household. In our village, men work outside the home as government workers, or in private firms or work in the plantations and bring food daily for the family.

SLD: Are there changes in villages today and how are these affecting women and families?

AF: Women are multi-tasking, care for the families, *fai'oa* economics, there's the women's committee, church meetings, on top of keeping her family in order . . . a woman's work is never only in domestic arena but traverses public arena too. Nowadays, the Bingo is the main thing many village churches use to fundraise for their projects. In the short run, it's a simple way to fundraise, but I also see negative impacts of Bingo. The other very good thing that is happening is the government had this program where the women are challenged to weave only large soft 'ietoga (fine-mat) for a price. This has changed the quality of fine-mats and has brought back the good quality fine-mat of old.

SLD: What do you know of women's rights, do you think our women have rights?

AF: Yes

SLD: But do they have a voice in meetings and organizations?

AF: Now, we do, but before we hardly speak we defer to our men because of customs and usage, and we defer first to elders, we ask their advice. As in the saying, "E fesili muli mai ia mua mai" [Younger ones and newcomers ask the older ones and firstcomers first]. I personally respect my elders, and *tautua* (serve), them. A problem that we have is the thinking that separates domestic space and public space, like the men speak at public events and women speak at private or to do with

home events. I feel with education, women have improved their own lives and those of their families. Like in education e.g. Tuitama'i your friend from primary school is the principal of our Primary school. In our district alone there are more female principals now than before. You hear of female CEOs in government departments and women are leading and adding their voice to the workplaces.

Previously villages used to do concerts and plays to fundraise money for projects, then they started going to New Zealand in the 1970s, but a popular way for villages to fundraise today is the Bingo. It would be wrong to say that only woman attend Bingo because in a face to face interaction life in villages, men, women, and even children are seen participating during the weekends. There are really no rules in an open fale (hall). While the economic benefits are viewed as positive, the social and cultural impacts are more detrimental than people realized. As Anela noted, if women are constantly going to Bingo and neglect their families, social problems and health problems are created when the children are not given directions and routine for homework, and chores.

A positive impact for women and household income is the government program that reintroduced the traditional art of weaving 'ietoga (fine-mat), which is soft, big, and finely striped, so the fine-mat is special in quality like the old ones. This program has resulted in the women's committee reviving and reinvigorating their participation in fale-lalaga (weaving guilds), and it is bringing back the quality of real "fine" mats.⁵ The reintroduction of this craft has provided pride and respect for this art and treasure, and they are demanding prices like \$500 to \$3,000 tala depending on the size and quality. These fine-mats take one to twelve months to make. Women weavers are also doing this individually, families can order 'ietoga for their special occasion and the money is craftspeople earn is enough to use for household needs. With the reintroduction of weaving 'ietoga, women and men are valuing each other's work; the revived 'ietoga has a redeeming impact on fa'alavelave, and families are not so concerned about the quantity, but rather want a quality fine-mat that is worthy of their kin connections and genealogy. It has also stemmed the cheapening of fa'a-Samoa and an unnecessary burden on families according to those I interviewed.

Another tama'ita'i I interviewed from Savaii, Ti'a Tuitama'i, is a fifty-four-year-old female matai and Principal of Salelologa Primary School. Before Salelologa, she was an Acting Principal at Iva Primary School, then a Principal at Salelavalu Primary School.

I asked her about women's role and status in education, and she responded that there has been improvement with regard to females holding senior positions in education, citing the fact there are thirteen female principals of primary schools in Fa'asalele'aga district, including herself. There are more female

principals than male now. There are definitely improvements in that aspect, and felt she was supported by the DOE and the CEO female Dr. Afamasaga Fuata'i. Ti'a talked enthusiastically about her work and was very motivated. She has sought assistance from the Australia High Commission in Apia for money to help build a fence around Salelavalu Primary School compound, to buy carpet for the classrooms at her previous school prior to Salelologa. She continued that when she became the principal of Salelologa Primary School, the road was all gravel, the compound was so rocky and rough children cannot play in it, so she sought assistance from the DOE and New Zealand High Commission. She got funding to pave the road to the school and eventually level the field, and also buy carpet for all the classrooms! Soon after, she learned the toilets and faucets for drinking needed to be fixed, and she worked with the school committee to get the bathrooms fixed and water running better. Overall, she observes Salelologa village and their families are becoming more accepting of having female matai. "My matai is a chiefly one, my family bestowed the title on me in recognition of my achievement and service as a teacher . . . no doubt it is also my family's tautua (service) and genealogical connection to it. I know at the moment, female matai have not been able to sit and take part in weekly matai council meetings. I can't because I work, will see!"

Irrespective of their location and villages, women matai are doing extraordinary work professionally dealing with the government, private sector, and their village school committees to provide the best education and facilities conducive to learning. To capture the diversity of places and age groups, as well as economic and education statuses of women, interviews in the capital of Apia were conducted in July 2017. Females I interviewed in Apia included Ola Letui, a fifty-five-year-old manager of a Computer Technology company, and Adele Stewart, a fifty-two-year-old manager of their family's hardware business. Both OL and AS were raised in Apia, were educated overseas on government scholarships, returned home to work for the government, and then moved to the private sector. AS has a connection to Savaii because her mother has family in Salelologa and her brother was the coach and captain of the Fautasi *Tolotolo Uli*, and she has some insights to share about women in the village. When I asked about the women and status in terms of leadership position, and the work they do OL and AS both agreed:

Today women are taking on more roles that traditionally were taken by men. In urban situations, more women are working in government as CEOs, like Revenue, Education, Central Bank, MNRE, first female Attorney General, and first female Justice. Advancements are also made in the private sector there are female CEO of Banks like BSP Apia, ANZ in American Samoa, women who found and own

businesses such as Fiti Leung Wai CEO of SSAB. In the government, look at Fiame Naomi the first female Deputy Prime Minister, and was a cabinet minister for thirty years. She's a good role model she started good initiatives, like parliamentarians by bringing in students to parliament, show them rights and own voice. In the last 10 years, women are finding their voice in many sectors and areas. If there are good role models there will be change . . . believe it reflects a global trend, look we have more female leaders like Prime Minister of Denmark, Germany, Britain, and New Zealand. In the last general election 2016, one of the five female candidates came in that way, she was the closest in numbers she won and is now a legislator. You should talk to Lemisio of Elections Commission for more info.

Regarding women's leadership in villages, AS said that her brother Pauli Ivan always talked proudly of the women's committee from Sakalafai Salelologa and their support during the Fautasi practices and Fautasi Race at Independence Day. He said that without the women's assistance with logistics, food, and organizing things, they wouldn't be able to function and win. It allowed Pauli to focus on coaching and training the crew. Women's committee was an integral part of the Fautasi Activities.

To gather views on the political aspects I met with the thirty-seven-year-old CEO of Elections Commission Board, Matthew Lemisio, and asked him about government and women's participation, gender equity, and CEDAW.⁶ Samoa ratified it in 1992 (Centre for Samoan Studies Report, Leasiolagi et al. 2015). Lemisio noted that when Samoa signed onto the CEDAW in 2013, however, the government didn't have the political will at that time, but as government noted the low number of female participants in leadership roles, an amendment to the constitution was proposed. The Tongan government announced it will ratify CEDAW in 2015 for the women of Tonga to close the gender equity gap. There were widespread protests, and the newly coronated King through the Privy Council pronounced the government's plan unconstitutional (Lee 2017). At the UN meeting in Papua New Guinea in 2015, Samoa was invited to present how it will implement it. CEDAW was officially implemented in the 2016 General Elections.

ML: So with political candidacy, Samoa used the idea of "gender neutral" no special treatment if a female, so male and female go through the same procedures: be a legal registered matai, reside in Samoa for 3 years, new monotaga bill, and women compete at the same level as men.

ML feels Samoa is a small country but has a big voice in the UN, the reality in Samoa is we have made huge strides in terms of gender rights as in maternity

leave with the Labor Act from six weeks to three months Centre for Samoan Studies report (Leasiolagi et al. 2015).

In talking about the relative impact of this move he cited the epigraph, “o le i’oimata le tuagane lona tuafafine” (one’s pupil is delicate and so important to sight that is how a brother’s love for his sister is)

... it is this manner of thinking about gender relations that Samoans remain flexible with these policies although there was resistance initially from the larger population, then there’s the rural vs urban, different villages, government and private sector, and the church. But there is changing attitude and big improvement from the last ten years with regard to women taking on leadership roles. One of the female candidates from Safotu, Sasina Gagaemauga won because of this new policy and now we have five female members of Parliament, I hope to see more female matai run in our elections. [Yes that’s Losa Stowers, we were classmates in high school]. I work with Fiame Naomi a key role model she has “gravitas” when she speaks everyone listens e.g. 2015 meeting in PNG for CEDAW. Women have a huge impact and positive contribution in our organizations ...

In an interview in January 2019 Hawaii (Sina Viane from Samoa, a twenty-one-year-old in her final year at NUS who visited for a few days during the holidays), I asked about gender roles, gender equity, and status of women generally.

Sina describes the notions of itupa vaivai (weak side) for female and itupa malosi (strong side) for male, that sheds light on perceptions of gender inequality that prevails in Samoan thinking.⁷ Yes with regard to the public sector like government jobs advances have been made there are more female CEO and acting CEO positions. But it has not grown to the extent that we can say there is gender equity. Also this does not mean women salaries are at the same rate as their male counterpart.

SLD: Why do you think there is gender inequality?

SV: There are still structural constraints on women’s struggle for equal treatment, recognition of their work as God-given ability, pay equity and others.

SLD: Who is to blame? What is the cause of this problem?

SV: E amata mai a i luga pule o le malo, ma le faiga o tulafono [Starts from the top, government leaders and policies that are implemented]

Even in villages when you have female matai the recognition given to them are not exactly the same as male matai . . . It's not all families and villages or everywhere but it exists, in our families, we defer first to our male counterparts when we deliberate during meetings or arranging an fa'alavelave. Like Malie village, for the longest time they banned women from becoming matai, and then just last October 2018, they announced, "we allowed women to receive matai title! Regarding salaries, the men often have higher salaries than the women even when they have the same degree.

SV's responses echoed same sentiment as Anela Feleti Interview January 2017.

Fa'a-matai, Women, and Moral Economy

The recent phenomena of faigā saofa'i (lit. making of matai titles) in the last decade, especially in the last five years, is examined to illustrate the increase in matai titles as well as an increase in female matai. I look at place of residence, Samoa and overseas; uxori-local residence, that is if the women matai is in her natal village and her husband lives with her family; and viri-local residence, that is the women lives with her husband's family, which is the most common. In describing this, transnational movements of Samoans especially those from the case studies are noted. Concepts of tautua (service), fa'alavelave, and vā (care for relationships) were repeatedly mentioned to refer to relationships, connections, and notion of legitimacy. In terms of where families are located, terms like fafo (overseas) and iinei (here), in Salelologa discourses oppose iinei as a source of spiritual, sacred, and material sustenance, against fafo as a source of economic power (Lilomaiaava-Doktor 2004). The study provides further impetus to the transnational literature regarding Samoan chieftainship, fa'a-matai, as in "transnational matai agency" (Anae 2019), and the transformative challenges to gender expectations.

As already discussed, "place" is an important factor in retaining Samoan values, but change is also negotiated and contested in different places. It is possible to invest in the 'aiga not only through movement abroad and educational achievements but also by conferring matai titles overseas. Today, the conferring of matai titles has become more frequent in Samoa, and with many more titles, with numbers ranging from forty to even one hundred matai titles in one occasion (Fruean 2019). Despite the decline in the traditional economic role of matai, their social and political roles remain intact. The village fonos retain the

political power to sanction unacceptable behavior. It is the matai who organizes the pooling of resources from immediate and extended family members, combining their contributions to hold fa'alavelave and then redistributing the gifts. Skillful organization of these institutionalized rituals enables matai to reposition their power base in society.

Traditionally, certain matai titles (chief or orator) came with the right to confer other titles (Meleisea 1989; Va'ai 1999). These can be conferred based on service to the matai and 'āiga by those related by toto (blood), tino (by adoption), or service connections and usually assumes that the conferment is done in Samoa on the malae where maota (chiefly house site) and laoa (orator house site) are located, for this adds legitimacy and authenticity to titles. While being in resident and residency are vitally significant, the proverb, "E malae tau 'ave le Samoa," translated, Samoan heritage, i.e., one's genealogy, and dignities are transposable, meaning people carry these with them wherever they go, people don't have to stay in one place to legitimize their place of birth or belonging, acknowledging the mobile nature of its society and people's relationships to their fa'asinomaga (heritage) as long as one maintains vā (care for relationships) with the home place (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009).

I examine how indigenous knowledge is maintained and reproduced in the diaspora, if metaphors and metonyms define women's roles, their movements, and ongoing interactions in Samoa and in new transnational contexts, what are the implications for gender roles and responsibilities as in tautua (service), fa'alavelave (lifecycle cultural events), and fa'a-matai (chieftainship system)?

Prior to 2015 only about 5 percent of all village based matai were women (Centre for Samoan Studies Report, Leasiolagi et al. 2015). In comparing the percentage of female to male matai, where historically only 5 percent have been female, there has been a big increase recently, for example, one village from Savaii in 2015 showed 38 percent of matai were women, and one village from Upolu 2018 showed 43 percent were women. The normative data showed a huge increase; however, the descriptive data provide other factors that are barriers to participation of women particularly in aspects of decision-making in political life.

Case Study 1

Matai saofa'i Luamanuvae title Salelologa, Savaii August 31, 2015, and the distribution of female and male matai and residences (Tables 1 and 2). There were sixty-six Luamanuvae alif'i titles, twenty-six were female matai and forty were male matai. At the same time, the Leatigaga (supportive title to Luamanuvae) was also bestowed on twenty-one in total, seven females and fourteen males.

TABLE 1. Female Matai and Place of Residence for the Two Titles.

Title	Savaii, Salelologa	Upolu island	American Samoa	New Zealand	Australia	USA, Hawaii	Total
Luamanuvae	6	6	1	5	7	1	26
Leatigaga	7	0	0	0	0	0	7
Total Matai	13	6	1	5	7	1	33

TABLE 2. Male Matai and Place of Residence for the Two Titles.

Title	Savaii, Salelologa	Upolu island	American Samoa	New Zealand	Australia	USA, Utah	UK	Total
Luamanuvae	11	11	2	9	5	1	1	40
Leatigaga	7	1	1	3	2	0	0	14
Total Matai	18	12	3	12	7	1	1	54

Case Study 2

Matai saofa'i Afamasaga, Faumuina, Niulēvāēa, Lepa'imasina Fasitō'tai December 31, 2018 (Tables 3 and 4). There were twenty-one Afamasaga titles, nine were females, twelve were males; thirteen Faumuina titles five were females and eight were males; two Niulēvāēa titles, one female and one male; and one newly established title Lepa'imasina bestowed to a female.

Irrespective of village and location in Samoa, the two case studies showed the large numbers of matai being conferred in one large ceremony; in the not so distant past there were fewer matai titles and was done usually when matai passed away. Certainly, matais have established faiā (connection) to the titles through criteria of toto e tasi (faiā through blood, genealogical) and tino e tasi (faiā through adoption, or service) with varying degrees. Of the sixty-six Luamanuvae matai, twenty-six were women and forty were men, or about one-third were females. It was indeed the first time for any woman to be conferred with the title and was quite a record for the family and Salelologa village. Luamanuvae is a chiefly title, and most of the recipients have senior status as children of direct descendants of previous holders. All of the female matai are daughters of matai of the family. Half of them live away from the homesite either in Apia/Upolu or overseas. Some are widowers living with adult children in their husband's villages. No female in virilocal residence but several in uxorilocal residence living at home (Samoa) received title Luamanuvae.

The Leatigaga matai had fewer, and this title is a matua (supportive role to chiefs, Tinousi, ma Luamanuvae), it is often given to the younger men of families and faiavā (uxorilocal) husbands of tama'ita'i (daughters and sisters of matai) of 'āiga. Of the fourteen Leatigaga men matai, eight were faiavā and six were younger brothers or cousins of elder siblings who received the Luamanuvae title. Again, of the fourteen of them six live overseas compared to eight who live in Samoa. Interestingly, of the seven Leatigaga female matai, all of them live in Samoa at the time, and most are from the next tier younger generation. Most were also living in Apia and some work in government offices.

As mentioned, previous faigā saofa'i (matai investitures) in Samoa had exceeded these numbers. On the surface, people went with the flow and the head matai's directive, but there was conservative cultural sentiment from those in the family who argue that giving so many Luamanuvae title is not right according to the suafa (title) and how it was, and that giving matai to women is not the custom, all this is cheapening fa'a-matai. Nevertheless, there was overwhelming agreement as to the appropriateness of the title, especially given the tama'ita'i faiā connections, the honors they brought to 'āiga from their achievements, and tautua they provide during family fa'alavelave. When I asked matai regarding

TABLE 3. Female Matai and Place of Residence for the Four Titles.

Title	Fasitō'otai, Samoa	American Samoa	New Zealand	Australia	USA	Total
Afamasaga	5	0	2	2	0	9
Faumuinā	3	0	1	1	0	5
Niulēvāēa	0	0	0	1	0	1
Lepa'imasina	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	8	0	3	5	0	16

TABLE 4. Male Matai and Place of Residence for the Four Titles.

Title	Fasitō'otai, Samoa	American Samoa	New Zealand	Australia	USA	Total
Afamasaga	6	0	3	2	1	12
Faumuinā	3	0	4	1	0	8
Niulēvāēa	0	0	0	1	0	1
Lepa'imasina	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	9	0	7	4	1	21

views on saofa'i, why the large numbers, and more female matai? Luamanuvae Viane replied:

Yes, this is unheard of in the old days, but nowadays, we have to adapt to changing needs of 'āiga, ua tupu 'āiga [families are growing] and dispersed iinei here and fafo overseas. Another reason for more female matai is there are more females than males in other cases only females are left here and all of the men are overseas. As the saying, "E sui faiga ae lē suia fa'avae," We have to follow criteria of selecting matai, then provide gifts (food, fine-mats, and cash) for the village matai council in order to legitimize matai investitures, and church ministers and guests. I see why people of 'āiga desire matai it's important to them and with living overseas a matai is your link to family whether you interact with them or not that is their call, if they love us, good if not, pau lava [just the way it is], but at least they have something to remember their family, and it's useful also for where they live and work particularly when fa'a-Samoa is practiced anywhere Samoans live.

The research demonstrates the change in thinking of being in residence and managing resources, as (Schoeffel 1995, 105) writes "that the increase in matai and particularly for women is because titles have become increasingly separated from the custodianship of land other fixed assets and also separated from particular polities and locations." From the matai and family members point of view, they believe getting a matai title is an important addition to the economic status one gets from education or economic strength. Thus, titles are given to honor persons of achievement living away from the homesite as representatives of 'āiga irrespective of gender. Bourdieu's (1984) idea of "symbolic capital," that a ritual status adds significance and weight to one's credentials; it is also important to their self-esteem.⁸ The exchange with the matai and conversations with fellow Samoans reveals a pragmatic response and that it depends on the context and pointed to the making of matai and other changes as a practical matter. It also is about tradition motivating change and that Samoans have used traditional cultural practices to justify changes they were making to their own cultural practices.

In the case of the matai investiture, at Fasito'otai village as in Salelologa village the number of female matai has increased. Of the thirty-seven matai titles bestowed, sixteen were women matai, and twenty-one were men matai, with twenty matai holders living fafo and seventeen living in Samoa. Again, for Fasito'otai village it was the first time women received matai in this family. In comparing Fasito'otai to Salelologa the number of matai living fafo is 54 percent to Salelologa's 43 percent.

I interviewed Afamasaga Viane regarding the bestowing of matai to women and the participation of women in political and village government affairs as in concepts of *sao* (contribution), *‘ai* (achievement), and *leo* (voice in decision-making).

AV: I am in our village matai council, been doing it for a long time. I know the *tama‘ita‘i* have positive contribution to *faigā-nu‘u*, village social and political organizations. Now that more women are becoming matai they should be included in (matai council meetings) [political administration of villages in matai council]. But still see no women matai in matai council meetings like in Lepea, or Salelologa, but in Fasito‘otai women matai participate in matai council meetings and make decisions. Women have made significant changes to help with village projects, church projects, health and hygiene of households. Women have a lot to add to village political life especially in the matai council. [SLD: Well I was told by two of the new Leatigaga female matai when they went with their *tauga* (food to share) to the Sunday to‘onai (brunch) of matai, one of the senior Leatigaga chased them off, saying don't be cheeky don't come to this place]. Why?

Descriptive data, as in interviews, reveal the actual happenings in everyday life and point to barriers to political involvement, access and participation of women in decision-making in matai council meetings presenting significant barriers to women's participation in local and national leadership decision-making. As long as women are excluded and their *leo* (voice) missing in village councils, church committees, community organizations at the village level, “it is difficult for women to become or be seen as national leaders” (Centre for Samoan Studies Report, Leasiolagi et al. 2015).

When I probed AV about the reason for the lack of *leo* (voice) of women in political life, he was quite frank with his response.

AV: Ah . . . yes traditional village government system has organized gender roles with separate statuses of women and men with executive authority vested in men is a given in Samoan customs—we are accustomed to thinking this way, but we know Samoans have changed, amended rules, just like we introduce universal suffrage in 1991 allowing 21 year-old and above, matai or not to vote, to CEDAW in 2016, so we can find ways to incrementally introduce change because the truth is, women are doing so much good work in our families and can do more in matai council. We must have the fortitude to change things for the better. Today, we need women matai in matai council

meetings to change incidents of corruption and cliques that's running amok in village government, need intervention badly today [today any small infringement of village rules and people get outrageous fines or banishment of individuals or families.⁹ There is abuse of the authority of matai and abuse of the aganu'u (culture) that's going on because of power of money that's influencing matai.

In saying this about female matai inclusion, it is believed women are more involved, will bring a broader and balanced perspective, also a caring perspective to decisions. In other words, care for the vā relationships and seeking consensus before rendering serious decisions that affect people's lives.

The famous adage, "O le ala I le pule o le tautua," the way to authority is through service, is how a person is selected to be a matai in addition to other attributes. Recognition of women's contribution and work as in tautua (service, serving) is confirmed and acknowledged in many conversations; however, this is not explicitly translatable to women matai automatically having a "seat at the table" so to speak or equal leo (voice) in village matai council meetings as in the case of men matai. This is a significant barrier to a fuller integration of women matai in local and national leadership roles and thus achieving gender equity.

How has transnational migration enhanced women's status? The research confirmed that women in the diaspora have done well regarding decision-making because of the absence of "rigidity" of traditional village structures and the church. It also suggests that as women's economic strength improved their desirability increased. The renewed interest in matai and the conferment of matai I suggest is twofold: many overseas Samoans have accumulated "real" power by virtue of their economic positions relative to those in Samoa; therefore, their desirability increased. But it is also a sign of indigenous Samoan institutions' supremacy becoming paramount, as Ti'a stated in the interview, the prestige a matai title can bring, which constitutes in Bourdieu's term "symbolic capital" adding weight to one's infrastructure status is sometimes highly irresistible.

Conclusion

Feminism is the belief in social, political, and economic equality of the sexes and has made huge positive impacts in women's struggle for gender equality and gender equity. I agree with its tenets, but a weakness of the feminist approach is assuming the category *woman* is culturally neutral and can be applied automatically in "reciprocity-based society," where women are relationally rooted in cultural understanding (Liki 2015). The research demonstrates the strong influence of cultural ideologies of traditional village government, that at times is supported by government policies despite the rhetoric of the unique and viability of

Polynesian women power. The interplay of indigenous, agency, and imposed factors are articulated, disarticulated, and rearticulated in the research. The indigenous roles of Samoan women have been both reproduced and transformed by colonialism, Christianity, and late capitalism. On the one hand, Samoan women have adapted and transplanted their power or power sharing roles into new social and political structures imposed by colonialism and the church. On the other hand, colonialism and Christianity have imported a brand of patriarchy, which has distorted and limited women's participation in decision-making. While there are improvements evident in the research, these are not equally shared by women and tend to benefit those with higher education status, those in urban areas, and overseas and limited to government and private sector. Contemporary Samoan men and matai have been willing to acknowledge the traditional importance of women as long as male dominance remains the visible reality.

NOTES

1. Penelope Schoeffel (1978, 1995) ethnographic studies of Samoan women and the concept of feagaiga are instructive and provide comprehensive coverage of gender and development. Women's komiti, Komiti tumāmā, and change from parallel organizations of matai and aualuma to women's committee as an extension of household activities.

2. However Fanaafi Le Tagaloa (1992) and Saleimoa Vaai (1999) noted members of this group have lodged complaints in the Land and Titles Court asserting their rights to be consulted in matters of title succession.

3. Leadership of women's committee komiti tumāmā were led by wives of matai, and the komiti became subordinate to the matai fono council rather than standing as a parallel institution as had the aualuma o tama'ita'i. The komiti tumama's role (relative to the work of men) was conceived of as being private, domestic, and contextually peripheral; it assumed duties that were wider extensions of the domestic work of the household, rather than the ceremonial roles that had been the prerogatives of the aualuma o tama'ita'i. However, feagaiga relationships within the komiti continued to provide a template for determining women's relationships in the komiti.

4. Moreover, the village fa'alupega acknowledge the personalities, and hierarchies of villages, districts, and national matai entities. It is the source of information on villages and titles, status, rank, authority, or lineage.

5. The 'ietoga is Samoa's most important wealth. It was very fine and silky in the old days, but by the 1980s as fa'alavelave increased both in Samoa and overseas, the 'ietoga was mass produced and the quality was compromised. Since women and families were concerned with the quantity, it cheapened the 'ietoga.

6. CEDAW, which stands for Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by United Nations Assembly. Described as International Bill of Rights for Women. It was instituted in September 3, 1981, and ratified by 189 states.

7. “itu pa vaivai,” weak side denoting women and “itupa malosi” strong side denoting men is paradoxical because while it gives the impression that the women are weak, in reality it was the women that saved and won the war for the losing side by defeating the powerful warriors, when the warriors learned it was a woman who defeated them they were ashamed and apologized, origin from Nafanua story and Malae ole Mā.

8. Nevertheless, some people question giving titles to young people, usually those in their mid-20s, because they are seen as youthful in their knowledge of fa’a-Samoa.

9. In the last twenty years, village fines and punishment of individuals and families were so frequent that it became a burden for families. Families questioned the integrity of the village matai council in giving out these fines, often with a month or less turnaround after notification to pay one hundred pigs or its cash equivalent of \$5,000–10,000 tala.

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