“I AM THE APPLE OF MY BROTHER’S EYE”

An investigation into the evolving roles of Samoan women with particular reference to religion and gender relations

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By

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For Suluga Lameta

Who taught me to be a Samoan woman

Family are not necessarily those of our blood but are also those who have become our blood. This work is also dedicated to the strong, driven women in my life who have helped to mould and shape me into the woman I have become.

*Ua taulāmua i finagalo ma mafāuauga tinā ma tama’ita’i o lo’u aiga. Fa’afetai tatalo, fa’afetai tapua’i, fa’afetai alofa.*

*Fa’afetai*
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Abstract
What does it mean to be a Samoan woman? The following thesis addresses this question by exploring the lived experiences of Samoan women with particular reference to religion and gender relations. Adopting an inter-disciplinary approach, it sheds light on the tenacity of socio-cultural and political factors that influence women’s roles and status. In particular, this research explores how Samoan women navigate the differing and often contradicting worlds of culture, Christianity, family, education, politics and gender.

Information for this research was obtained through a series of interviews and literature analysis of primary and secondary sources. It has been the aim of this thesis to prove, not only to myself, but to those with a background and understanding similar to my own, that we, as women, are not inferior within Samoan culture. The participants’ words have been integrated throughout this thesis from Chapter One so as to emphasise and give strength to the voice of Samoan women. This thesis is centred on the inspiration and aspiration of these women and as a result, their testimonies have been brought alongside the literature as opposed to being supplementary. Women’s roles as sisters, wives and daughters are explored and the question is posed whether their cultural importance and status has been diminished by the influence of Christianity.

From the evolution of women’s roles, to the changing meanings of the feagaiga, from the arrival of Christianity to the present day, women within Samoan society play a role that is imperative to the proper function of families, villages, districts and nation. The arrival of Christianity has not stripped us of our traditional importance but has increased and expanded our roles. We, Samoan women, are not oppressed, we are not suppressed; we have a voice, a place and dreams.
Preface

O le iomata o le tuagane lona tuafafine¹ ‘a sister is the apple (pupil) of her brother’s eye’ is a proverb that speaks to the heart of this research. This thesis, whilst focusing on the acceptance of Christianity, will also look at the relationship between Samoan men and women, particularly that of brother and sister. The question this research seeks to answer is whether the rapid absorption of Christianity has led to the suppression and oppression of Samoan women.

Throughout history, an individual’s role is judged, and in many instances defined, in relation to others. Therefore, this thesis will look into the role of women by discussing the relationships Samoan women work to uphold. This thesis also seeks to look at the common assumption of early writings on the Pacific that saw women who crossed over from their traditional ‘spiritual’ and ‘domestic’ roles into the ‘secular’ and public world of the males as extra-ordinary and atypical.

Women are invisible in anthropological studies of politics, which is assumed to be a male domain. Failure to recognize the diversity of women’s political role is built into background assumptions of male dominance and men’s monopoly of power. These assumptions are further reinforced by the notion that politics occurs beyond the domestic sphere associated with women. According to this view, women are parochial or disinterested in the public world of male politics; in other words, women are non-political.²

¹ Oral transmission of Samoan proverb in reference to the relationship between brothers and sisters.
Whilst appearing patriarchal Samoan culture has equal and opposing roles for men and women as well as a fair and equal division of labour. In essence, the relationship between men and women within Samoan society is complementary. Traditional Samoan values will be discussed in regards to women and their roles both in society and in the church. A discussion will also ensue on a new perception of Samoan gender roles; how things became the way they are and where they may go from here.

Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi (Tui Atua) writes that:

Samoan history is the story of tulaga vae... footprints in the sands of time. For oral Samoa, the languaging and recording of these footprints were done by way of rituals, dances and chants. This is something not fully realised by many scholars... engaged in writing Samoan history. There are a number of reasons for this, some to do with imperial arrogance, others to do with a lack of indigenous language competency.³

Many sources have been consulted throughout researching this topic; however, the core works behind this thesis have been written and researched by Pacific peoples. In addition there are several works from the nineteenth century written by non-Pacific scholars that have been heavily relied upon. These works are based on information gleaned from Pacific peoples; recollections and narrations, for example, in the writings of missionaries John Williams and George Turner, as well as those of more recent western academics like Niel Gunson and Michael Field.

The conscious decision to keep to a core of indigenous writings, for example, those by Peggy Fairburn-Dunlop, Fana’afi Le Tagaloa Aiono and Misilugi Tu’u’u, is to place emphasis on the fact that Pacific history, genealogy and world-view are not as clear cut as the West prefers it; Pacific history is non-linear. For Pacific peoples, time is not understood as it is in the west, Albert Wendt observes:

For me there is no difference between time past, time present and time future. I’ve been persuaded by the new physics and Samoan philosophy that there is only an ever-moving present… For us also the future is past, we look to our ancestors and the principles they lived by to guide our lives. Time is a continuum that changes as a unity if we alter a part of it… it’s a holistic, ecological view of the world.  

Pacific history is cyclic, it is not disjointed, our mythology is our history, our history is our present and our present is our future. Wendt talks about the study of Pacific history and compares historical leanings of both the west and the Pacific.

The historian who views reality in a Newtonian way, seeing time as being one-directional, will of course see history chronologically, rationally, sequentially with cause and effect...  

Nicholas Thomas draws attention to the idea that the best method of understanding a people and culture is through the study of these institutions as a whole. Thomas argues that the compartmentalizing, generalizing and

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oversimplifying of Pacific cultures and histories can only lead to inaccurate studies being carried out. Wendt corroborates this argument by saying:

I’ve written mainly about my own people. I hope I’ve illuminated some areas of who those people are and, through them, what people are like everywhere. I hope I’ve also destroyed some of the stereotypes and fallacious myths about Samoa, Polynesia and the South Seas.

In this sense then, I must also talk about the positioning of myself within this research and context. Throughout this thesis, I employ the first person to illustrate and give examples; I am also constantly positioning and repositioning myself within the contexts of this research. This style is autobiographical and a discussion on the use of this approach must be carried out to explain the idea behind this method of narration. The positioning of, not only myself, but self in general within a narrative is a practice that happens throughout the Pacific academic world. Academic works that come out of Pacific Studies, as well as research projects and works by Pacific academics generally, all host the same characteristic of positioning self within the context of thesis topic. Due to the oral nature of Samoan culture, the use of the first person has been transferred to the written form. Within oral cultures, it is imperative that the narrator be placed within the story, either as the observer or the person giving this specific narrative. In this light, it only makes sense that Pacific narratives and its written forms use genealogy, first person, personal experience and context as a means of imparting knowledge and facts to its audience. There are many examples of this within indigenous oral cultures such as the writings of Fanaafi Aiono Le

Tagaloa, Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, Tamasailau Sualii-Sauni, Albert Wendt, Melani Anae and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to name but a few.8

In positioning myself within this research, I should also explain about the prevalence of stories and descriptive narratives employed throughout this study. This work is an investigation into the absorption of Christianity and the resulting evolution of gender roles. However, it is also a tribute to Pacific ways of knowing and employs narratives to illustrate and teach, just as I myself was taught through the story telling of my grandmother, what it truly means to be a Samoan, and more importantly, a Samoan woman. Stories are a part of our culture, our history, we learn by them.

Someone once asked me what importance this research plays in the greater picture, and my answer to them was this: ‘what you research needs to be interesting and needs to mean something to you’. It is an increasingly common observation that western cultures are slowly but surely losing their religious foundations. Pacific nations, on the other hand,

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are becoming increasingly influenced by the Christian beliefs of Pacific people. I am not seeking to right ‘supposed wrongs’ within Samoan culture, neither am I attempting to blame these ‘wrongs’ on Christianity. What I hope to show with this research is that there is a side to the union of culture and Christianity that many do not understand, nor acknowledge. Within this research the question I pose is whether the introduction of Christianity and its rapid acceptance has led to the oppression of women in modern Samoan society. This research will look at women’s historical roles both in culture and traditional Samoan religion and will hold these up to present day roles, gauging differences and similarities, and will comment on whether, as a result of this merger, women in Samoa have diminished roles and political voice within modern society.

I would like to give a brief insight into the direction from which this thesis is coming. I am of New Zealand European and Samoan descent, born in Christchurch and raised in Samoa. I have always felt a need to address the huge inconsistencies and double standards I have seen within the Samoan nation and within western perceptions of the role of women, especially as sisters, wives and daughters within Samoan families. This work is an assertion of my own identity and ideas toward the institutions of both my worlds. The personal agenda behind the investigation into the role of women in Samoan society is a selfish one. Through this focus I seek to find my own place and voice in traditional Samoan society.

The need to find my own voice results from my mixed heritage and whilst I am extremely proud of both my bloodlines, identity is something I have struggled with for most of my childhood and adult life; it has been this struggle that has largely influenced and defined the adult I have become. Growing up as a half-caste in Samoa has meant that I
have been excluded from various cultural practices and certain fundamental ideas that envelop Samoan understanding and knowledge. This is not for lack of trying on my parents’ or family’s behalf, it is merely the way things work in Samoa, and this research is not going to change this state of affairs. It is my hope, however, that this work will aid those who are setting out on their own identity journeys, seeking to find answers to who they are and where they stand in a world that is rapidly changing. My feelings are summarised superbly in the writings of Tui Atua, who writes that:

...I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share a tofi (an inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging. These are the reference points that define who I am, and they are the reference points of other Samoans.  

What this excerpt illustrates is that while my background, upbringing and experience within Samoan culture has been limited there is a sense of belonging and understanding that is symbiotic. The further I push for knowledge and understanding the more I am drawn into the history and stories of my people. I am Samoan, I am proud to be Samoan and I have found where I belong.

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History vs Mythology

To the academic mind, history is defined as the recorded past. It encompasses the events and actions accompanied by dates and is typically recorded in a hard copy of some form, whether on stone tablets, Egyptian papyrus, books or in digital form. There are three different Samoan terms that can translate into the English word ‘history’, these being tala, tala fa’asolopito, and tala’aga. Loosely translated, these words simply mean stories, for that is what history has always been to Samoans. What this illustrates is the idea that Samoans account for the fact that history is rife with individual interpretation and expression, it is a living organism that changes and adapts in relation to who is telling the story and who is listening. The nature of oral cultures means that our ancestors, their actions and our genealogies are all narrated and taught to individuals through stories. From my own education and understanding of western concepts mythology is stories (made up) that contain mystical beings and paranormal events generated to create some form of social order within society, before the rule of law.

Stories are important throughout this research which is why I myself refer to the many stories my grandmother told me as a child, as this was my only means of learning the Samoan version of Samoan history. For mythology there is no Samoan word, as there are no distinguishing characteristics between the idea of history and mythology within Samoan understanding. To the Samoan, history and mythology are one and the same. While this research is being presented for examination in a New Zealand University, and is therefore informed by western ideas, I am attempting to remain as true as possible to Samoan

understanding and concepts. In this light, it makes sense to look at myth and history as the same thing, as it is the west that forces a distinction between the two. When mythology is mentioned therefore, I am merely talking about an instance in Samoan history.

There is a reductionist approach to studying Pacific culture, history and people that has a tendency to break everything down and examine each aspect of culture and history individually and in many cases, out of context. The problem with this, as Luamanuvaow Winnie Laban points out, is that this method of evaluation does not do justice “to the complex pattern of interactive events, people, places and communities that is the Pacific.”

Samoan history is not measured through chronology, but in terms of people and associated events. For example, if an historian were to look at the presence of Nafanua in both Samoan mythology and history, time-wise her presence in all these narratives is physically and logistically impossible. However, when looking from the Samoan perspective, this phenomenon is explained simply by stating that these 30 generations or so is the time of Nafanua’s reign.

… a Polynesian view of life is not one of places, nor does it yearn for possessions; it is filled with people… Today, as in the past… the underlying motivation is pride – pride of self – of family, and of race.

Gunson talks of the birth of a high chief and illustrates the Pacific understanding of time by looking at the chants performed as a rite of passage. The recorded chant began with

12 Ibid.
cosmogenesis, rites of passage, and the soul’s journey concluding with the child’s lineage.\textsuperscript{14} There is no linear logicality to his sequence. The chants begin with the past and end with the past. Where the child has come from and whose blood flows through their veins is more important than where they are going, and what they might achieve in their lifetime.

**Division of Samoan history**

As a way of illustrating the cyclic and overlapping nature of time within Samoan understanding I shall look at the division of eras within Samoan oral history. Samoans divide their history into four stages:

1. The first of these is the period of creation that also encompasses the period of Tongan dominion over the Samoan people. This division also holds within it the period of the division of the nation into political districts.

2. The second of these overlaps with the first in the sense that Samoans are still under the control of the Tongans, however, this period also encompasses the rise of the Samoans and their ability to remove themselves from the clutches of the Tongans.

3. This third period was the age of the Samoan monarchs (\textit{O le Tafa’ifā}), and began at the demise of Tongan rule. This period also lasted up until the German annexation of the Samoan islands.

4. The final period of Samoan history begins with the arrival and progression of Christianity within the island nation and continues to this day.\textsuperscript{15}


This timeline, illustrated by Meleiseā, emphasises the idea of an overlapping and fluid concept of time and history. From creation narrative, to Tongan domination, to freedom; from the creation and rise of the Tafa’ifā ‘the Samoan monarchy’ to the domination of the Samoan people under the rule of the Germans, to the arrival of religion and missionary teachings culminating in the freedoms Samoans enjoy today. There appears to be repetitiveness within the history of the Samoan people that again reiterates the arguments of Thomas, Gunson and Wendt. Pacific history is cyclic, it is fluid, and it can only be understood when studied as a whole, and not broken into parts, compartmentalized and taken out of context.

Because of my own view as to how Samoan narratives, history and research should be carried out the structure of this thesis will be fundamentally different from the norm. It will be written in a way that accommodates the spherical nature of Samoan, and even Pacific history, genealogy and understanding; readers will be able to read this thesis back to front, as well as front to back.

Throughout Polynesia the historical traditions offer great scope for reinterpretation if we are prepared to understand them in the context of social evolution and change and not treat them as static and unchanging forms.16

Pacific history in the days of Polynesian ancestors was never documented, but was passed down from generation to generation through stories, proverbial expressions, songs and narratives. There is a Tongan saying that explains how I feel about this method study

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and teaching: *koe lava pe a Ulukalala, koe lava peia a Vava’u* ‘if something is good enough for Ulukalala (Tongan high chief) then it is good enough for Vava’u (island in Tonga)’. If this form of historical account was good enough for my ancestors, then it is good enough for me.

Throughout this thesis, the term ‘traditional’ is consistently referred to when discussing both culture and religious beliefs. Within this research, the use of the term traditional, whilst problematic in itself, is the simplest way of differentiating between religion before and after conversion to Christianity in Samoa. When traditional culture is mentioned, it simply refers to the aspects of Samoan culture practised by pre-Christian Samoan people.

There is much knowledge to be gleaned from the issues that are raised within the study of both Pacific peoples and Pacific Island nations. Whilst this study is focussing on Samoan people, the concepts and values that are discussed within this research can be correlated with other peoples of the Pacific or with any society in which Samoans reside. The institutions of religion and Christianity have been an immense influence in my own life and upbringing; this research is an extension of this background. With the tone of this research set in the way that it is, it is not my intention to cast doubt upon the validity of individuals’ beliefs and ways of life.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the researching and writing of this thesis there have been many people who have influenced, participated and advised on both thesis content and technique. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family, both those in Samoa and in New Zealand. I would also like to thank Dr Michelle Schaaf and Professor Michael Reilly, without whose help I would not have been able to research and complete this study; this thesis is as much a reflection of their input as it is my own work. There are so many people to thank, however, I would like to thank Suluga Lameta, to whom this work is dedicated; if it were not for you, I would not be the woman I am today. I would also like to give all honour and glory back to God, whose teachings and principles are one of the fundamental truths in my life. To those I have not named, you are not forgotten, thank you for your encouragement, your input and your understanding.

Finally, as you read through this work, may you be blessed with the knowledge and power that accompanies understanding, and let my final words be in line with the nature of this research; in the words of a Samoa long ago and through a blessing given by a father to his son upon leaving for battle: May you be as dark as night (be invisible to your enemies), may your eyes be light (be alert) and may blood flow in your wake (be victorious in all you do).

Ia pouliuli lou tino, malamalama ou mata, ma ia tafe toto i ou ala.

Fa’afetai ma ia manuia.
Throughout this research, the argument set forward is that the modern roles and status of Samoan women are a direct result of the interaction between the pre-Christian ideals of male and female relationships (both within the family and without), and the ideals, policies and legacy left by Christian missionaries and their wives. As will be illustrated throughout this thesis, it is incorrect to assume that the arrival of missionaries in the Samoan islands was directly responsible for a diminished role for Samoan women. It is also extremely unjust to assume that the role of women in Samoa is diminished. While some aspects of Samoan culture that traditionally provided women with high status have diminished over time as a direct result of missionary arrival and legacy, other aspects of Samoan culture have maintained their importance and continue to supply women with opportunities to both maintain and increase their status and voice within modern Samoan society.

The position of women among the Samoans is, when all things are considered, not only satisfactory, but enviable.  

Today the role of women can be broken down by looking at the integration of traditional Samoan gender roles, pre-Christian power dynamics and the ideals of Christian

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missionaries, their wives, and their religious teachings. What this research will illustrate is the various ways that missionaries, and their presence in Samoa, have effected change within the culture, with specific reference to the changes effected to the roles, status, voice and political power of women within this island nation.

As a direct result of Christianity and missionary legacy, Samoa’s national motto ‘Fa’avae le Atua Samoa’ states that Samoa is founded upon God, and there is not a Samoan alive who would argue this point.

Before missionaries arrived in Samoa, we believed that Tagaloa created all things. Today, we proudly say that it was and is the Christian God, Iesu, who created all things. It’s funny; most Samoans will not acknowledge any religion ever being present in Samoa other than that of Christianity. But it remains true, when missionaries came to Samoa, we worshipped and prayed to gods, and a god, other than Jesus.  

It is important to understand that when investigating the missionary legacy and its effect, especially on Samoan gender roles, missionaries were not only imparting religious teachings to the Samoan people, but were transferring their own culture, ideas and more importantly, secular aspects of their home societies. Eighteenth and nineteenth century ideas on marriage, daily life, sex and education were taught through missionary example and Samoans were expected to adopt these ideals if they were to be allowed into the fold of the Church.

The following chapter will provide an introduction to this thesis. It will also introduce the reader to the nation of Samoa, by providing an outline of its physical location

in the Pacific and an insight into its people. The methodology surrounding the collection of information, interpretation and style of presentation will also be discussed. Also included within this section are brief participant biographies as a simple indicator of where these informants come from, their background and to provide an insight into any biases that may appear in their interview answers/opinions. This chapter will also provide definitions and discussions on Samoan concepts utilized throughout this work. Finally there is a brief discussion on critical works cited; tying up this chapter is a quick ‘road map’ of the structure and direction this thesis will take.

Samoa and the Samoans

O le Malo Tuto’atasi o Samoa ‘the Independent State of Samoa’ is situated, according to most Samoans, at the heart of Polynesia, however, for those with less romantic ideas of home and geographical location, Samoa is situated halfway between New Zealand and the islands of Hawaii, lying at latitude 13 and 15 South and longitude 168 and 173 West. With a population of just under 200,000 people making up the former German colony, Samoa’s people are a people of respect, intense spirituality, loyalty and obligation. From the earliest accounts of Samoan history, Samoa has been a land of explorers and seafarers, navigating their world by the light of the stars.20 Samoa's history is one rich with conflict, not only politically motivated, but also with the arrival of missionaries and their respective religious teachings. The Samoan people have been both the colonized and the

colonizer, both the convert and the missionary. From civil war to international rivalry, from Christian conversion to the outflow of Samoan missionaries, Samoans have played an important role in the ‘opening up’ of the Pacific region.

The Samoan people are a deeply spiritual people, whose belief in the ‘spirit world’ and ‘ancient power’ defines much of their adult life, expectations and world understanding. Stair points out that “they [Samoans] were burdened with superstitions which were most oppressive and exacting.”21 Women play an integral role in traditional Samoan religion and spirituality; women practised and still do practise traditional, pre-Christian, forms of healing and medicine. Women were the spiritual lifeblood of Samoan society.22 Family, God and community are the three fundamental concepts that make up Samoan culture, understanding and way of life. The life of a Samoan person is founded upon three concepts, those of language, family and genealogy, of which religion has become a part.23

There is much to learn from this fusion of ideas and values; what we as people should seek to learn is how traditional ideals and customs have evolved, and in turn shaped the worldview that we, as people, now hold. The Samoan people are a people of reciprocity, obligation and community; it is these ideals that can help form a better and more prosperous society, however, the conflict here is the increasing drive towards individualism.24 The true essence of Samoan society showcases the ideals of community and how this ‘caring for community’ can lead to the increased caring and betterment of the

21Ibid. p210
23Ibid.
24Ibid.
individual so long as the individual’s priorities are akin to those of the wider community. There is much interest in the issues that plague the Pacific, and its people. There is also an increased interest in the ideals that have helped mould and shape the new form of society, beliefs and rituals that are practised by the Samoan people.

There is ongoing debate on the importance and role of women in global society. Women are seen as the backbones of many indigenous societies, and are the facilitators and teachers of cultural knowledge and social norms. While studies have been done on the role of women in developed, western societies, and just as many have been done on the role of women in indigenous societies, very little research has been carried out on the ever-evolving role of women in Samoan societies whilst looking, in particular, at the effect religion has had on these roles. Western academics like Margaret Mead, Penelope Schoeffel and Derek Freeman have made their names by researching Samoan females and femininity. More recently, Samoan academics, such as Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, Aiono Dr Fanaafi Le Tagaloa, Tamasailau Suaalii and Lisa Taouma have also made a name for themselves whilst looking into the roles, expectations and aspirations of Samoan women.

Many, when discussing the role of women in society, point out the obvious, saying that society would not exist without the active participation and reproductive responsibilities of women. Therefore, women are the most important aspect of any society and should be treated thus; however, this research seeks to make a more in-depth and detailed observation of women in society. Much family and cultural history would be lost if

25Ibid.
women in society did not exist and actively take part. Whether it is scrap booking, keeping photo albums, quilt making, weaving fine mats or dying *tapa* (bark cloth), women play a crucial role, especially within indigenous societies, in the collection, explanation and recitation of history. This is due mainly to two simple facts; firstly, that many indigenous societies, particularly those in the Pacific, are oral cultures, and they rely on societies’ elders to remember, explain and pass on their cultures histories. Secondly, most mothers within the Pacific, and indeed across the world, are a child’s first teacher. Whether it is how to talk, how to eat or how to relate to others, a mother’s, and in many instances a grandmother’s, influence is paramount and more permeating than any other influence in a child’s life.

Fairbairn-Dunlop suggests that even though Samoan culture does not place great emphasis upon whether an individual is male or female, Samoan culture does value men and women differently, in respect to the division of labour. While both males and females can be nominated as family, village and district chiefs, predominantly male candidates are chosen, however, the woman’s veto within discussions is of utmost importance. This veto acts as a form of check and balance to ensure that the equality of the sexes is upheld. The division of labour in both traditional and modern Samoan society will be discussed later on in this research, with particular reference being paid to the relationship between men and women.

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28 Ibid.
Methodology

Due to the nature of indigenous research, and the idea of oral histories, I needed to utilize a mixture of research approaches.

A rapidly and unpredictably transforming world requires transformed research approaches…Regionally oriented research of wide thematic scope such as Pacific Islands Studies – whose past we want in the present context to honor, and to whose future we would like to contribute – aspires toward understanding a wonderful diversity of human lifeworlds that can hardly be interpreted within a single-discipline framework.31

Much of this research was carried out through the interviewing of selected participants and a series of interviews were planned prior to travelling to Samoa to carry out this research. Unfortunately, upon my arrival in Samoa, a majority of the participants had changed their minds about being interviewed for a variety of reasons. A number were involved with preparations for the South Pacific Games that were being held in Samoa and were too busy. Others simply decided that they were not comfortable with a face to face recorded interview. As a result, a majority of interview participants opted to answer interview questions by using participant questionnaires rather than through oral interviews. Participants were asked to answer the questions in their own time and questionnaires would be picked up at a later date by the researcher. In being given the choice of questionnaires or face to face interviews, the rights of participants to respond to both the issues and questions at their own pace was upheld. Questionnaires were also provided in the Samoan language, and so participants, in accordance with fa’asamoa protocols of fa’aaloalo and

vafealoaloa‘i ‘deference and mutual respect’, could give answers in a language they were comfortable with and also answer in any order they chose or felt was right.

Approaching the diversity of an interdisciplinary inclusiveness that extends beyond academic disciplines in the humanities, social sciences into local worldviews and indigenous epistemologies, taking these on board as partners in dialogue and collaboration toward a plurality of knowledge.32

Over a period of eight weeks, whilst carrying out research in Samoa, approximately forty questionnaires were handed out; however, by the end of this eight week period, only four were completed and returned. Unfortunately, this affected the content of this thesis in a big way, as my hope had been to base this thesis upon the answers gleaned from the issues and discussion points raised within participants’ answers. To redress the shortfall, I sought other interview participants on my return to New Zealand. Hence the interviewing of Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, Participants H, I, J K and L. All of them are Samoan women, but based outside of Samoa. These ‘extra’ interviews were carried out in several ways: three were done through electronic mail (e-mail), one interview was carried out over the phone and the rest were face to face interviews. The use of e-mail has been argued to be of immense value by Selwyn and Robson, as a potential research tool as it gives the researcher access to samples previously unobtainable. This method of research is also unobtrusive and helps create relationships previously impossible to forge due to distance.33 Initially, I had planned to interview Samoan males within this study; however, due to the circumstances mentioned above, I was unable to do so.

32 Ibid.
The questionnaires given to participants were organized in such a way that those answering them did not feel pressured into giving a particular answer. There were two different sets of questions, the first set were for the wives of pastors and the second set was for those who were not (refer to the appendix for both complete questionnaires). None of the questions given to participants asked any direct questions about the role of women as the feagaiga, as this is a central theme throughout this thesis. The intention behind this method of indirect questioning is an acknowledgement that the feagaiga is an all pervasive concept, I have chosen to explore it by using a method of indirect questioning so as to allow participants to pick up the idea of feagaiga in different contexts. In this thesis, when interviews are mentioned, the author intends these to be understood as the answers gleaned from participant questionnaires, oral interviews, phone interviews, e-mail conversations as well as follow-up conversations with those participants who chose to answer questionnaires. Whilst a majority of the participant’s views and answers will be recorded word for word, a small selection of the information taken from these questionnaires has been edited by the author.

The interview participants vary in age from 21 years to 85 years of age. This was done so that a sample of the nation’s women might be achieved. The women interviewed are Samoan chiefs, teachers, clerks, lawyers, students, pastors’ wives, authors, mothers, sisters, grandmothers and, of course, daughters. All participants, bar one, are of Samoan descent, and all have lived in Samoa for a greater part of their lives. The selection of interview participants has been mostly made through family connections and acquaintances that, given the short timeframe of the research, would have been impossible to make if family had not stepped in to lend a hand. While this selection of participants seems to be
discriminatory, one must understand the protocols of research within the Samoan indigenous context. I am a young, single Samoan female, and as such, cannot simply go out and recruit research participants. Within fa’a Samoa there is a concept called the Va ‘relationships’. Everything within the Samoan context is based around the relationships that the va maintains and upholds. There are several types of va the Samoans must uphold:

\[ \text{Va o tagata refers to the relational space between people; va feiloa‘i refers to the protocols of meeting; va fealofani refers to the brotherly and sisterly love that people should show one another, va fealoaloa‘i, the respectful space, and va tapua‘i, the worshipful space.} \]

As such, research participants outside of my own sphere of knowledge and reality were approached by family members. Another factor that is an important part of this research methodology is the idea of Pacific research being dictated by the principles and practice of talanoa. Simply put, Talanoa means to talk. When put in a research context, talanoa means to hold meaningful and respectful conversations. Much of this research is based upon this principle of talanoa. In accordance with the protocols of fa’ a Samoa participants must be comfortable enough with the researcher and their topic to be able to hold meaningful, informative, descriptive and respectful conversations. Within the Samoan context, cultural knowledge, history and traditions are passed from generation to generation by means of this living and breathing form of knowledge.

Many Pacific writers and theorists now talk about and disseminate the idea of Talanoa as a research methodology, in the study of Pacific cultures and peoples.\(^{35}\) The

\(^{34}\) Clayton, Leanne (2007). ‘Patterns and Motifs in the Va’. Auckland University of Technology.
\(^{35}\) Huffer, Elise and Qalo, Ropate (2004), ‘Have We Been Thinking Upside-Down? The Contemporary Emergence of Pacific Theoretical Thought’, The Contemporary Pacific, 16 (1); Otsuka, Setsuo (2005)
emergence of *talanoa* as a valid and academically accepted method has been beneficial to the undertaking of this research, as it is only through conversations and stories that the true crux of this thesis can be achieved.

**Talanoa as a Research Methodology**

In writing about *talanoa* as a method of researching Pacific peoples and cultures, Havea defines *talanoa* as a point of interconnection and intersection.

Talanoa is a word used in several of the native languages in Oceania... to refer to three interconnected events: *story*, act of *telling* (of memories, stories, longings and more), and occasion of *conversation* (teasingly and critically, and usually informally). Talanoa is more than one or two of these, for talanoa is all three events – story, telling, conversation – together. Talanoa is a point of intersection...

From the above quote we can ascertain the true nature of *talanoa*. For both researchers and those being researched, *talanoa* allows us to find ourselves and our stories within the context of the research being carried out. In employing *talanoa* methodology, we are taught to value different stories, contexts, methods and individual voices.

Talanoa obliges us to tell, interact and interrogate, and to resist the temptation to take possession and to have dominion... Both story telling and oral cultures are unfairly romanticized and discredited in academic circles, where scholars draw hard distinctions between story and history, speech and writing, orality and textuality, and so forth... Storytelling is not an innocent

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36 Ibid. p11

37 Halapua, Sitiveni (2007). 'Talanoa - talking from the heart'. *SGI Quarterly*. 47.
activity, and storytellers don’t retell stories just for the sake of retelling. Storytelling is intentional and selective, biased and political. So is talanoa.  

*Talanoa*, simply translated, encompasses all modes and nuances of communication. There is the act of telling the story, those receiving the story, those retelling the story, and in my case, those capturing and textualising the story. *Talanoa* allows the individual researcher to become a part of the narrative, to belong and find not only meaning but acceptance within the contexts in which the stories are told.  

Talanoa… is true to itself when it is that gift which continues giving, and that gift which continues to be given.  

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**Talanoa as a Writing Style**

While there are numerous sources that look at *talanoa* as a research methodology particularly in relation to interviewing, very little acknowledgement, is given to *talanoa* as a writing style. As a writing style, *talanoa* gives legitimacy and lends a sense of formal distinction to oral cultures.

*Talanoa* is the art of translating oral narratives into descriptive written text. It is the ability to hold a conversation with the reader, with my ancestors and with my future children. It is a way of looking back to the past, at those in my present and those in my

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future. As a writing style, *talanoa* informs all methods of research, narration and collation within this work. Melani Anae writes that the style in which her thesis is written

Reflects and continues the metaphor of *'ie toga* in that the strands of a subjective writing style, prevalent in my own reflections... interweave with the objective writing style of academic conjecture, to integrate both subjective and objective perspectives... flowing easily across and in and out of both formal and informal writing styles reflecting both *papālagi* and Samoan thought and metaphysical processes.41

Anae’s integration of both the subjective and objective perspective results in a work and writing style that is steadily becoming the norm for many indigenous researchers. Huffer and Qalo talk about constructing a body of thought to influence and find meaning within mainstream academia and compare it to the building of a Samoan *fale* (house).

It must provide shelter from the outside elements and bring comfort to those inside. It must not shut out the world but be able to invite the world in, on its own terms. In short, a body of Pacific thought should contribute to the establishment or affirmation of a Pacific philosophy and ethic – a set of applicable concepts and values to guide interactions.42

What Anae, Huffer and Qalo all point to is a discussion of how to present research based on indigenous principles so that these concepts might be grasped and understood by the reader. In using descriptive text, stories, personal experience and in utilizing this method of *Talanoa*, this thesis becomes a living and breathing study that the reader can relate to and understand.

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42 Huffer, Elise and Qalo, Ropate (2004). 'Have We Been Thinking Upside-Down? The Contemporary Emergence of Pacific Theoretical Thought'. *The Contemporary Pacific*. 16 (1). p89
The following section of this introduction is a short biographical explanation of the interview participants. Several participants preferred to remain anonymous and shall be known simply as Participant E, H, I, J, K and L. The remaining participants, after their short biography, will be referred to by their first names.

**Participant Biographies**

Several factors were considered when participants were being sought. I initially set out to interview 10 individuals, eight females and two males. Four females working within government, two males working within government, my grandmother, my mother as an outside observer and two faletua, ‘pastors wives’. However, as discussed within the methodology section this did not happen. The participants below, aside from Suluga and Lisa Lameta, were recruited with several factors in mind:

1. That the age ranges give representation for each generation of Samoan women.
2. That there be a mix of women who are and are not matai.
3. That there be an even ratio of women who are married and single.
4. That the women interviewed not all be teachers.
5. That there be an even ratio of women who work and women who do not (these women who are not working are either studying or are stay-at-home mothers or caregivers).
6. That there is an even number of women with and without children.
7. That wherever these women may be based, that they have strong ties to both their local Samoan community as well as Samoa.

Participant A – Suluga Lameta is 85 years old and has lived her entire life in Samoa. As a teacher, and then teacher trainer, she has been actively participating, not only in Samoan culture, but also in the teaching of the Samoan language, epistemologies and training. Suluga is also my grandmother, from whom much of my understanding of
Samoan culture has come. Sadly Suluga passed away at the beginning of 2013 and this work is dedicated to her memory.

Participant B – Lisa Lameta is 46 and is the only participant in this study who is not Samoan. However, she has lived in Samoa for the past 24 years, and her views on the workings of the Samoan culture and the role of women in Samoan society are invaluable as those of an outside observer. Having married a Samoan, Lisa has been expected and required to fulfil the roles of a Samoan woman, and it is these expectations that have led to my wanting to analyse her answers. Lisa is my mother.

Participant C – Olive Galuega is 26 years old and works as a youth facilitator at her family church. She is also currently studying towards a degree in agricultural science. Olive’s role in the family is that of daughter and sister, however, unlike any of the other participants in this study, Olive is a single mother.

Participant D – Lemau Motusaga is 23 years old and works as a Law Clerk in Apia. She is also active in the church and helps within the youth ministries of the church. Lemau grew up in one of the outer villages of Upolu, the main island of Samoa, and has been subject to a more traditional, and stricter upbringing, and her views of women, their roles and their way of life in Samoa are crucial to this study.

Participant E – (Anonymous) is 33 years old and studying at a university. Participant E is extremely passionate about their Samoan heritage and practises their Samoan culture and language on a daily basis.

Participant F – Meafou Gafa is 40 years old and is currently teaching at a Christian school in Samoa. Meafou is married to an ordained minister; however, they do not as yet
have a congregation. Meafou has a Master’s degree in history, and her views, while influenced by both western education and traditional institutions, are crucial to a well-rounded understanding of Samoan women and their role.

Participant G – Tagaloa Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop is a lecturer and author from Auckland University of Technology, Auckland. Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop is also a mother and avid observer of the ever-changing and expanding role of women in Samoa. She has written various works and carried out numerous studies on the role of women in Samoa and her feedback and opinions are invaluable to this study. Much of her writings have also been consulted throughout the researching of this topic.

Participant H – Participant H preferred to remain anonymous and will be referred to as Participant H throughout this thesis. Participant H grew up in Samoa, before emigrating to New Zealand where they now live and work. While living in a western society Participant H maintains their Samoan cultural practices and traditions. Their children also uphold and maintain many of these ideas and practices that are so important to Participant H. Participant H is 46 years old.

Participant I – Participant I is a lecturer in Pacific Studies. Participant I also prefers to remain anonymous; however, they possess a wealth of knowledge and understanding on issues regarding both women in Samoa and New Zealand.

Participant J – Participant J prefers to remain anonymous, however, participant J was born and raised in Samoa and is 28 years old. Participant J is also extremely passionate about their Samoan heritage and practises their Samoan culture and language on a daily basis.
Participant K – Participant K prefers to remain anonymous, however, Participant K was born and raised in Samoa and is 35 years old.

Participant L – Participant L prefers to remain anonymous, however, Participant L was born and raised in Samoa and is 54 years old.

**Definitions**

Culture as used within this thesis will adhere mostly to the Tylor definition cited by Monaghan and Just:

…culture… taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.⁴³

There are many definitions that can be cited in regards to culture, however, the above definition from Tylor points out an important aspect of culture; that what we choose to believe is in fact part of our culture. What we believe makes us members of a select group of people and is indeed taught to us from a young age not only from explicit and direct teaching, but also from individual observation.⁴⁴ This idea in turn affects our understanding of the discussions that will ensue throughout this thesis on the role of women. Culture is not static, it is taught and in the very nature of teaching, can change and be interpreted differently from generation to generation.

⁴⁴ Ibid.
Religion is an important aspect of this research. In many anthropological definitions the concept of belief is something that is fundamental to individual identities. These definitions also involve the idea that belief is the essence of any particular religion. Religion in this case then, is the practising of those beliefs that are at the heart of individual and group identity. This will be the definition I use within this section on religion. For the purposes of this thesis, the assumption will be made that beliefs are held by everyone, and that these beliefs are influenced by various external factors such as religion, environment, race and level of education to name a few. This thesis will also take the definition, quoted by Eller, that in using the term belief he means

…any belief that directly or indirectly relates to beings who are held to possess greater power than humans and animals, with whom human beings sustain relationship (interaction and transaction), and who can affect human lives for good or evil… beliefs related to supernatural beings.

From this definition, legitimacy is given to both indigenous Samoan religion as well as that of Christianity. It is of utmost importance to portray the equal legitimacy of both indigenous and the more modern Christian religion due to the new religion that has emerged from the union of traditional beliefs and practices with the fundamentals of Christianity. In the Samoan case, Christian religion has been ‘Samoanised’, and aspects of indigenous religion have been adopted and adapted to slot into the strict practice of Christianity.

47 Ibid. p30
…The reception of Christianity was facilitated by the compatibility between much from the old religion/fa’aSamoa (or ‘Samoan way’) and Christianity by the fact that the fa’aSamoa remained (and remains) strong in the modern era. Both Christianity and the fa’aSamoa ‘recognise the interrelatedness of the individual and the community’…

There are not many Samoan people who would consider traditional pre-missionary Samoan religion as a true religion, however, religion functions to provide certain aspects of any social and cultural phenomena. Eller talks of the six functions the practice of religion provides. These functions are the following:

1. Religion fills individual need. Religion, and the beliefs held by those who practise the religion, imparts to its followers a sense of comfort and hope, perhaps even a sense of love. However, there is definitely a sense of power and control imparted as well as an overwhelming sense of relief from “fear, trepidation and despair”. One of my participants made exactly this point when they commented:

Knowing that God is looking after me in all aspects of my life, gives me great comfort. Knowing that as long as I believe and stay true to my Christian values, and that after I die, I will go to heaven helps me deal with all the trials I face in my life.

2. Religion provides an explanation as to an individual’s origins and as to causes of events. Within a large majority of indigenous societies there is the understanding that when sickness and adversity fall the reasons behind this bad luck are put down

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to the spiritual realm, rather than natural causes. This point was well made clear by one of my interview participants:

I prefer to think and believe that we were created in God’s own image, rather than think that my ancient ancestors were monkeys... Another reason I think Samoans took up Christianity so easily is the fact that Christianity also equates bad things happening as a result of the spiritual realm being in chaos. This is in line with Samoan pre-Christian beliefs.

3. Religion is also an apt source of rules and norms to be adhered to within individual life and within wider society.

4. Religion is also a means of social control. Whilst things such as politics are forms of social control, they are limited to what they can prove and what is observed, however, with religion, there are ultimate sanctions and people are accountable to an almighty being whose vision transcends the natural.

5. Religion is not only a way of explaining problems, but is also the solution to all these problems. “If religion is the ‘cause’ of a variety of human ills, then religion can be the solution as well.” On of my participants amplifies this insight:

Like I said before, we like to think that bad things happening are a result of chaos in the spirit world, I think this gives us some comfort because we are not powerless, there are things we can do to right this imbalance. If our spirituality, or lack of, is the cause for “bad luck” then it can also be the thing to change our “luck”. I think if we were to simply believe that we have no control over what happens to us, then we can do nothing to help

55 Ibid.
56 Ibid. p11
ourselves.\textsuperscript{57}

6. The sixth function of religion that is to fulfil the needs of society. “The primary need of society, beyond the needs of individuals, is integration, cohesion, and perpetuation, and religion can provide the all important ‘glue’ toward that end.”\textsuperscript{58}

Participant L corroborates this sentiment:

Why is religion important? We all prefer to believe in something bigger and greater than ourselves. We all like to think that we are not alone, that someone is looking after us all the time.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Samoan Concepts: Definitions}

\textit{Aganu’u} is the Samoan concept of culture and includes the ideals and norms that encompass individual identity and national identity, as well as all the customs and traditions that are involved with the formation and acceptance of these identities.\textsuperscript{60} To me, culture is the idea of past and present life experiences, merging with the belief system of a nation or individual, and culminating in the institutions of culture that, in turn, affect and influence the way we live, and the world view we hold. When asked about her understanding of the concept of culture or \textit{aganu’u}, Meafou answered that:

It is the Samoan way of life; unique in its own way. The \textit{Fa’asamoa} is an important part of this understanding and it is all that pertains to the Samoan people including their beliefs, way of thinking, way of doing things and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[60] Personal knowledge.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
lifestyle.\textsuperscript{61}

*Fa’asamo*a is simply translated as the ‘Samoan way’, the Samoan way of understanding, way of life and worldview.\textsuperscript{62} It is the way that Samoans do things, the way they look at and understand their environment, and it influences their decisions and mode of life. *Fa’a*Samoa embodies everything that makes an individual a Samoan. I especially like and strongly support Ngan-Woo’s definition of *fa’a*Samoa:

Fa’asamo is likened to an immortal tree with roots that grow deep into the ancient world. Fa’asamo is watered by the rains, warmed by the sun, and shaped by the winds from the four corners of today’s world. Its substance is changing, its philosophy has extended and its practices have been enriched. In spite of these changes, Fa’asamo is Samoan. In brief, Fa’asamo has adopted some institutions that are new, but in each case has adapted and modified these institutions so that they meet Samoan needs in a Samoan way.\textsuperscript{63}

Within the definition above of *fa’asamo*, Ngan-Woo puts emphasis on the importance of Samoan ties to their environment and the oral nature of their culture. Ngan-Woo also emphasises the idea that no matter what influences Samoans from the outside, the saying stands true: *o le maota e tauave e le Samoa* ‘wherever a Samoan’s journey may take them, their culture will follow’.\textsuperscript{64} Upon being asked about the meaning of *fa’asamo* and its relation to the Samoan individual, Olive answered that:

Fa’asamo is how we do things, for example our Fa’aaloalo (respect). Fa’asamo has been changed over the years, the foundations remain the same but how we do things has changed. For example the sua – in the past we use vala or siapo, taisi and moa, nowadays we use papalagi material,

\textsuperscript{64} Personal knowledge
packets of biscuits and money, but it’s still the sua (Fa’aaloalo).\textsuperscript{65}

The above quote talks about the evolution and ‘westernisation’ of a particular Samoan cultural concept. The \textit{sua} as defined by Milner is the “formal presentation of a specially prepared and cooked pig by way of a tribute to an honoured guest… presentation to a member of a travelling-party when he is a kinsman of the hosts”.\textsuperscript{66} Olive talks about how, traditionally, Samoans, when giving the \textit{sua} would use \textit{vala} or \textit{siapo}, which is simply translated as bark-cloth. This bark-cloth was also accompanied by \textit{taisi} which is a package of food and \textit{moa} or chicken. However, today, due to easy access Samoans use cloth-material accompanied by cabin biscuits and money when giving the \textit{sua}.

\textit{Feagaiga} is a major concept within this thesis. As this chapter is purely introductory, a brief and very basic explanation of this cultural concept will be given here and will be expanded on further on in this thesis. Schultz simply and broadly defines the \textit{feagaiga} as meaning

\begin{quote}
…a covenant, agreement or treaty between two parties which designates mutual rights and obligations.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Participant K, in talking about the \textit{feagaiga} and its importance in modern day Samoa argued that while the \textit{feagaiga} may not have the same meanings as in the days of our ancestors, the concept within culture is still paramount in every Samoan’s mind and understanding.

Being Samoa means that you understand the principles of the *feagaiga*. Everything we do, everything we say, the people we respect and the battles we choose to fight are all directly linked to the idea of *feagaiga*. It [the *feagaiga*] is the most important part of a Samoan’s life. All relationships within Samoan society are founded on the *feagaiga*. When we understand *feagaiga* as a covenant, it makes sense that everything within Samoan society is based on these principles.68

Women in Samoa are positioned within both the political and societal hierarchy by their position within the family and in their natal villages. To understand the role of women in Samoan society it is imperative to understand the meaning of the various terms and names given to Samoan women. The first of these is *Tama’ita’i*. *Tama’ita’i* has been simply defined as connoting a lady, or a princess.69 Aiono Dr Fanaafi Le Tagaloa talks of the meaning of the term *tama’ita’i*, and illustrates the meaning of its term by saying that the *tama’ita’i* is the ‘‘Lady’ of the extended family or *aiga*, or the ‘ladies’ of the village’.70 Aiono also argues that in more recent times, the term *tama’ita’i* takes on the double meaning of sister and covenant.71 Within the Samoan culture, the covenant between sister and brother is the most sacred of all relationships and is one that stems from the traditional mythology of Samoa and the narratives of Nafanua. It is important, at this junction, to acknowledge the fact that the term used to describe all women in Samoan society is linked with the most sacred of all relationships in Samoan understanding.

The second of these terms used to connote women is the term *Tinā*. Put succinctly, the term *tinā* is the Samoan word for mother. It is no accident that one of the most common

71 Ibid.
terms used for women in Samoa is that of mother. The act of childbearing and rearing is an extremely important part of the life of a Samoan woman.72

The third term for female or woman in Samoa is that of Fafine. If literally translated, fafine correlates to the English word for woman. However as Aiono states, it is unfortunate that the negative connotations (sexual overtones) that come with the meaning of fafine in the Samoan understanding have been attached to the understanding of the term within the western concept.73 This simply means that the west has taken the term fafine to mean the same as the English concept of woman; however, Samoans view the term fafine in a negative light as it implies that one is sexually promiscuous.74 Aiono corroborates this by saying that the term fafine, from the Samoan understanding, has “derogatory overtones.”75

Women in Samoan society are also ranked within society according to what social group they are members of. There are various groups that a female can belong to over the course of her life, and as her circumstances change, so too does her role within society.76 The following terms refer to the societal groups to which women can belong, and as these various groups are mentioned a great deal within this thesis it is essential to impart an extensive definition and understanding of these social groups.

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74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
The first of these groups is that of the *Aualuma*. The *aualuma* encompasses the young, unmarried women of the village, that is, the *aualuma* is made up of the *tama’ita’i* of the village. There are many instances where the *aualuma* are referred to, in order to justify and emphasise the importance of the idea of purity, chastity and holiness within Samoan society. My favourite story that uses the *aualuma* to illustrate an important understanding of the Samoan woman is the story about the *aualuma* as referred to by Fairbairn-Dunlop. She relates the popular Samoan legend that has to do with the thatching of a Samoan *fale* (house). *E au le inailau a tama’ita’i* “The ladies’ row of thatch was complete, but the gentlemen’s row of thatch was incomplete”. This proverb talks of the dedication, endurance and perseverance of young Samoan women, which will be discussed in detail further on in this thesis.

The second of these groups is that of the *Faletua ma Tausi*. The *faletua ma tausi* group comprises the women who are married to the chiefly men of the family or village. Tagaloa mentions the feminist argument regarding the meaning of *faletua ma tausi*, and refers to the literal translation, this is that *faletua ma tausi* stands for the backhouse and nurturers of men. Tagaloa then goes on to say that the term cannot be literally translated, and the role of this group will be ‘lost in translation’ for want of a better expression. Tagaloa explains her understanding of the social group *faletua ma tausi* and she also emphasises the idea that this group is the “adviser that the house depends on; the backing

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which a matali finds difficult to do without”. By this, Tagaloa means that women are the ‘behind the scenes’ players whose support enables the day to day running of society. My own understanding of the social group faletua ma tausi is much the same as Tagaloa’s. While men appear to be the heads of families and do most of the speaking within any type of forum, women are indeed the neck that supports the head. As a side note, it is important to mention that if Samoan words or concepts are taken literally, and not as a whole idea, much of the meaning is lost; a literal translation of Samoan terms may only be one layer of what the terms actually means.

**Samoan Cultural Concepts: Definitions**

*Fa’aaloalo* can be understood as a parallel to the western ideals of courtesy, respect and honour. *Fa’aaloalo* is an important concept in the Samoan world because it is only if you show this expression in your everyday life that you will be listened to. An individual will not be welcomed and their input into wider society will not be valued if they fail to observe this concept. From my own understanding, the interpretation of the term *fa’aaloalo* can be the English equivalent of humility and respect.

As a Samoan, I know my community is based on families and extended families, aiga, aigapotopoto. Individual identity is defined by aiga. In fa ‘asamoa the individual and their aiga are inseparable. We do not stand alone. Our community is based on the Samoan values of alofa, fa’aaloalo, and agaga. Love, respect for age, reciprocity and spirituality. These values are demonstrated through Tautua – service. Samoan custom tells us. *O le ala I le pule o le tautua* – Service is the road to power. Service to parents,

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80 Ibid. p5
family, service to church, service to community, service to our nation. This is fa'asamoa.\textsuperscript{82}

\textit{Matai} is simply the titled head, or figurehead, for any Samoan nuclear and extended family.\textsuperscript{83} However, the term \textit{matai} encompasses so much more in the Samoan individual’s understanding. The inherent \textit{mana} of the \textit{matai} is, in many instances, traced directly back to their lineage and genealogy in relation to Samoan ancestral power.\textsuperscript{84} With the arrival of western forms of understanding, knowledge and popular government, the form of \textit{matai} power and authority has changed from that of stewardship, leadership and community, to those of political leader and instrument.\textsuperscript{85} From my research on the evolution of culture and the indigenisation of western democracy I have come to the conclusion that the role of the \textit{matai}, because of its solidification within the Samoan constitution, has evolved. This evolution will be expanded on during the discussion of the role of \textit{matai} within Samoan society.

\textit{Aiga} in Samoan understanding simply encompasses the idea of family, however, to the Samoan this is not only the nuclear, or immediate family, but involves the working of the entire extended network of family members. The \textit{aiga} is the smallest political unit in Samoan society, and as such, is one of the most fundamental concepts in the Samoan diaspora.\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Aiga} collectively decide who will represent them as their family \textit{matai} and that \textit{matai} will then sit on the village council or \textit{fono}. This village council will also be a part of

\textsuperscript{84} Personal knowledge
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
the wider district council and the discussions of the nu’u (district). Effectively, aiga are the ones who controlled the practice and actions of traditional Samoan governance and politics.

During participant interviews, many of them answered the question on aiga with much the same candour. Participants were asked what aiga essentially is or means and how important aiga is to the Samoan individual. The following were some of the answers given by Suluga, Olive and Lemau:

*Aiga* is one of the most important cultures we have. It is my heritage from God. It is where I lived with my parents, brothers, and sisters. It is where I belong, and it is my identity. It is important to me because it is the place where the relationship between parents and children is fostered, because it is where love grows. This is where I grew up and the place where I learned my roles as a Samoan woman. We Samoans believe in the family, where the parents and grandparents are role models for their young ones. It is the place where I learn to respect other people.  

*Aiga* is where our roots, identity and belonging are. Aiga is where your father, mother, sister and brother are at and maybe other relatives. It is very important to belong or to know your aiga, because it is where every Samoan child’s ‘fa’asinomaga’ is – fa’asinomaga is what you are entitled to – e.g. land, titles and language.

*Aiga* is the origin of a Samoan. It is where we were born and raised, where we learn the basics and the most important aspects of our life and survival. The aiga is very important to me, say 70% of what I am now is because of the aiga I have.

The term *faifeau* if translated literally means to serve, and in pre-contact times, the term *faifeau* would be used in the above context, as if to say who would serve the chiefs? Since the arrival of Christianity, the term *faifeau* translates as pastor, or minister, of the

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Christian religion, as they are in the service of the Lord. In the pre-Christian era, the 
faifaeu were the young men of the village who served the chiefs and through their tautua or 
‘service’ would earn the rights to leadership. This idea of tautua or service has been 
transposed onto pastors and today everyone is meant to give their tautua to the church and 
as an extension, to ministers of the gospel.

Because the Samoan economy and every day life are focused on the aiga and is 
very much subsistence based, reciprocity plays a big part in Samoan life and culture. 
Subsistence merely refers to the production and harvesting of produce and other resources. 
Within subsistence based societies people only harvest and produce what they need for 
themselves and their families or villages to survive. Reciprocity is the idea that you give 
gifts, whether of food, money or materials, to a family when they are going through a 
fa'alavelave (which could be anything from a wedding, a funeral or the ceremony of 
conferring matai titles) so that when your own family is facing these sorts of financial 
obligations people will help in the form of the above mentioned gifts to lighten the burden 
carried by families. This reciprocal relationship can be seen all over the Pacific and is a 
product of the focus on family, genealogy and lineage amongst Pacific peoples.

Obligation on the other hand has more to do with the pre-existing expectations that 
are commonly accepted within Samoan society. Once again due to Samoa’s society being 
based on the ideas of subsistence, obligation does much to further the situation of Samoan

92 Personal Knowledge
families, and in turn of villages and districts. Obligation, in the Samoan culture, is an unwritten understanding between individuals, families and even villages that necessitates the sharing of resources so that the burden can be shared. Simply put, obligation is the understanding of the fundamental ideas behind the concept of reciprocity and an agreement to adhere to the laws of culture and carry out the terms of reciprocity amongst one’s family, village, district and nation. Samoans are obliged to help others, so that in turn, they themselves will be aided in times of need.

**Discussion of Key Written Sources**

Various types of literature and media were used in this thesis including journal articles, official government documents, books, theses, websites, and statistics as well as interview transcripts and oral accounts. These various sources have been produced by both outside observers as well as participants in Samoan politics and domestic issues. In attempting to critique and evaluate the narratives of Nafanua and other figures within Samoan mythology and oral history, problems arose as to the varying written accounts of Samoan narratives. While I myself have been told stories of Samoan mythology from a very young age, I felt that academic sources should be cited to back up my own knowledge. This proved a difficult task because of the oral nature of Samoan culture and the many differing accounts of Samoan mythology. Instead, I decided on two main academic sources from which to take my examples and narratives. The first of these writings were the

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93 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
narratives recorded by Even Hovdhaugen in *From the Land of Nafanua*. I felt that in reading through many different books, Hovdhaugen’s accounts seemed to be the least western influenced in that they are a direct translation of a Samoan individual’s account, and they are also the closest narratives to my own re-collection of Samoan mythology. Hovdhaugen’s writing also includes the Samoan transcript of the interviews from which his account of Samoan mythology is translated, and as a result comes across as a sincere and genuine account, in that the account is a direct translation from an interview. As Samoan culture and history are orally and aurally based, this narration of Samoan mythology seemed to be the most central to the understanding of Samoan concepts due to its intense focus on language and strict adherence to culture.

The second account of Samoan mythology was recorded and translated by Misilugi Tulifau Tofaeono Tu’u’u in *Rulers of Samoa & their legends and decrees*. Much like that of Hovdhaugen, this narrative of Samoan mythology contains both the English and Samoan accounts of Samoa’s pre-history, however, Tu’u’u goes one step further and outlines the genealogy and kinship ties that are most important when looking at the Samoan diaspora and mythological origins. As stated previously, due to the nature of Samoan history and understanding, the use of lineage within Samoan mythology is of utmost importance to a Samoan. It is these blood ties that are, in many instances, overlooked by those who are unable to fathom the importance of lineage in Samoan understanding.

In regards to researching the arrival and establishment of western religion in the Samoan Islands, I have taken the diaries and writings of early missionaries to Samoa as a way of understanding, from the grass roots, the arrival and influence of the Christian religion in Samoa. The Samoan journals of John Williams provide an apt description of the
Samoan islands and her people at the time of his arrival in 1830. These journals also talk briefly about the beliefs of the people upon missionary arrival, and also include the mythology and prophecy that led to the easy acceptance of Christianity and the dismissal of traditional Samoan beliefs and gods.

I believe that it is an inherent part of this research to look at the ‘samoanisation’ of western religion. For this part of the research the writings of Liua’ana, *Samoa Tula’i*, have been studied thoroughly as Liua’ana takes into account the mythology surrounding the Samoans. Liua’ana also looks at the establishment of religion and, more importantly, the political effect of western religion on the Samoan people which in turn has influenced the gender roles we see in Samoa today. The political impact of religion on the Samoan people is of utmost importance as Samoan society and culture are highly structured and intensely political in nature. The fact that the politics of organised western religion have influenced the sexual politics and national politics of a nation is of significance in Liua’ana’s writings.

Another source that has been heavily consulted when looking at the history of Samoa, Samoan beliefs and genealogies, is the writings of Brother Fred Henry of the Marist Brothers Mission. His writing covers issues and ideas from Samoa’s pre-history (pre-missionary arrival) to the arrival of missionaries. Niel Gunson is another western academic whose writings on the methods of researching Pacific histories, and his discussions on traditional leadership in Samoa, have been used within this thesis to provide a forum for understanding the cyclic nature of Pacific histories and the nature of women in leadership within the Pacific.
In writing about the roles of women in Samoan society, various texts have been used. However the two main sources of this information, excluding the interview findings, are *Tama ’ita ’i Samoa* by Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop and the *The Social Status and the Economic Roles of the Females in Traditional and Modern Samoan Society* by Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le Tagaloa. Fairbairn-Dunlop interviews Samoan women both in Samoa and in New Zealand, and uses their views, understandings and their own perceived roles to provide a well-rounded understanding of the Samoan woman. Tagaloa looks in-depth at the everyday life of selected women in Samoan society and provides an apt description of village and family life for Samoan women within society, their extended roles, their strengths and their ideals.

**Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. The first of these sections contains all the introductory information on both Samoa and Samoan women. Chapter two will be looking into pre-Christian Samoa, looking at the roles and status of women within Samoan culture. Chapter three will be a discussion of the various narratives from the life and reign of Nafanua and the role of women in Samoan mythology. It will discuss, in relation to Samoan women, instances of Samoan mythology and the perceptions that can be gauged from these narratives. Chapter four will look at the content and practice of traditional Samoan religion, the role of women within the system of belief and factors pertaining to the relative ease of absorption of Christianity. Chapter five will then delve into the life and story of Queen Salamasina as a method of understanding the political involvement of women in traditional Samoan society. Chapter six will look at the history that surrounds the
arrival of Christianity, missionaries and their respective churches, from the acceptance of these missionaries and their beliefs to the present day. As this research is focusing on culture, an ever-changing phenomenon, it will be based around the Samoan perspective of culture, and their views on religion, religious history and religious practice. This information has been gleaned from the interviews carried out over the period of time it has taken to complete this thesis and literature analysis.

Chapter six is a response to the main thesis question as to whether the absorption of Christianity has led to the oppression of Samoan women. It will look at the role of women in Samoa, both past and present. This part of the thesis will examine the traditional and contemporary role of women in Samoan society. Their traditional roles as the nurturer, gatherer and ceremonial caretaker will be expanded upon and investigated. This section will then move on to look at how these traditional roles have evolved over time to encompass, largely due to technological advances and development, an expanded world and increased worldview. The penultimate chapter of this thesis raises the question of what the future may hold for both Samoan women and Samoan society in general. This section will attempt to answer the questions raised within the thesis on the future possibilities and opportunities open to Samoan women.
Chapter Two
Samoan Culture and Women

The following chapter will be looking at the three legged stool model of Samoan culture and life. This chapter will then look at instances of Samoan pride, culture and identity, reciprocity, fa’alavelave, aiga, and obligation. The chapter will go on to describe women’s roles within Samoan culture, women as teachers, facilitators, and their roles in the village and home in relation to the literature and interview participants’ views. A large section of this chapter will be looking at the ideals and transformation of the concept of feagaiga by discussing the feagaiga in historical, contemporary and religious context. The chapter will also talk about the societal groups of aualuma, faletua ma tausi, and the wives of untitled men.

The Samoan way of Life

The Three-legged Stool

Samoan culture is supported, like a three-legged stool, by three pillars of strength. From the moment of an individual’s birth, right up until their death, there are three fundamental principles upon which their life is founded and their world-view is shaped:

1. They are born into a family and belong to a Matai, who is responsible for looking after the family and is the steward of the family’s belongings, or estate.
2. A Samoan person’s family has land. *O le Samoa mativa o le Samoa e ta‘a e le o iloa lona aiga ma lona faasinomaga.* This means that land is a gift from God bestowed upon a family, of which they must be good stewards.⁹⁶

3. The third of the Samoan pillars is that of the Samoan Language. A Samoan person should know its richness and how it is a necessity for him/her to know how to use it for the betterment and development of them as individuals and for their people. Much of the Samoan culture can only be gauged through the understanding of the Samoan Language.⁹⁷

**Samoan Pride**

Samoans are a very proud people and Henry talks about several factors that envelope and encourage the immense pride of the Samoans. Henry talks about four main facts that make Samoans proud to be Samoan. The first of these is the fact that Samoans have maintained the strength of their blood lines, and to this day is one of the ‘purest’ Polynesian races.⁹⁸ This fact is also mentioned by Buck in *Samoan Material Culture*, however, he states that these assertions are not scientifically based, and until the Samoans,

⁹⁶ Samoan proverbial saying.
whether mixed or full-blooded, can be dealt with as an entire group, this claim cannot be proven. The second reason Samoans are an extremely proud people is based around the idea of freedom and independence. Over a long period of time, Samoans have maintained their freedom and independence, even whilst under colonial governments. The third of these reasons is that cultural traditions, institutions and customs of the ancestors have been maintained and/or upheld. The last factor Henry mentions is the idea that the above mentioned customs have allowed Samoans the respect of powerful European nations, for both the social institutions and political organization. Colonizing powers, when taking over the nation’s politics, used the pre-established political mechanisms of the Samoans. By changing very little, they were able to rule the Samoans through the matai and village system. The social organization of the Samoans was extremely advantageous to both the nation’s colonizers, and later on those wishing to develop the islands. The decisions and power within Samoan society rested within a few families and stand-out personalities. Once these individuals and families were won over, they could indeed have free reign within the nation.

Culture and Identity

Our identity and cultures have been forged over centuries marked by voyages across the world’s largest ocean. We have been described by anthropologists as “ocean people” with a much different way of seeing the world. We sailed to survive and while our islands were tiny and remote with

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
very little resources our conception of the world was not confined to land mass but to how far this ocean would take us. This ocean did not divide us but connected us and remains our common playing ground and home to many cultures that remain connected through the voyages taken in the past.\textsuperscript{103}

When looking at Pacific, and even Samoan cultural identity, we must keep in mind that these cultural identities are forever in a “state of becoming”, people are eternally on a journey to which there is no end, there is no one set destination, there is no right or wrong answer: identity and culture cannot be put into a box and compartmentalised.\textsuperscript{104} We as people are forever changing our environment, experiencing new things, and being influenced by the environment and events happening around us.\textsuperscript{105} As Vilsoni Hereniko has written:

\begin{quote}
\ldots who we are is not a rock that is passed from generation to generation, fixed and unchanging. Cultural identity is process, not product. The oral histories, imaginative literature, and the visual and performing arts of the islands indicate significant moments in the evolution of cultural identities.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

**Reciprocity, Fa’alavelave, Aiga and Obligation**

Traditional authority arises from the kinship group structure, is sustained by concepts of obligation and reciprocity, and function through the twin

\textsuperscript{104} Denoon, Donald. et al. (eds.) (1997). The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid. p428-429
Reciprocity, fa’alavelave, aiga and obligation are extremely important to the survival of the Samoan culture, as we know it today. Due to the communal nature of Samoan society, within both the traditional and contemporary context, these four concepts play a part in the day to day living of the people as well as being crucial to the ceremonial and official life of a Samoan individual. It is believed that once the community thrives, the individual can do nothing but thrive also, which leads into the discussion of the communal focus of Samoan society and the integrity and importance of the aiga, or family.

Reciprocity and obligation go hand in hand within Samoan society. It is what makes every day life tick over. They are indeed the wheels that keep the system turning. Reciprocity is an inherent part of Samoan culture. As mentioned earlier, within cultures that are subsistence based, reciprocity is used as a means of providing for those in need. Samoan society is dedicated to the idea of gift-giving; one’s wealth is indeed measured by how much one can give to others. Reciprocity cannot function on its own, it must have a companion, and this companion is the idea of obligation. Samoans have an intense obligatory duty to those both in their family and in their village.

Samoan society’s requirement of endless redistribution has immense implications for the individual in Samoan society. Due to these constant demands upon any material wealth and any amassed resources, and also because a good Samoan must fulfil this criteria of redistribution and reply to societal demands, the personal accrual of any amount of money and goods becomes well nigh impossible. Even a matai, who essentially receives

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more resources than they either know what to do with and more than any other individual in Samoan society, must in turn redistribute these resources to members of his or her family, so they, too, remain poor. This aspect of Samoan society ensures that the communal standing of individuals, families, villages and districts are maintained. The idea is that the entire group benefits and wealth is spread out evenly across the population. According to Suluga, reciprocity is the act of giving and providing for those around us who need help, and obligation is the promise of a return on our giving.  

The aiga can be seen as both the immediate and extended family of an individual. The aiga, in the political sense, is the nation’s smallest political unit, and up until 1991 when universal suffrage was brought in, the aiga was the most important part of the political process. In essence, it was the aiga that actually controlled the political process. This was a result of the Samoan practice whereby only matai were eligible to vote. These matai were democratically elected by the aiga and so led to this phenomenon of the aiga controlling the nation. When asked about the concept, understanding and importance of aiga, participants all answered in a similar fashion saying that:

Aiga is central to our way of life. Without our families I don’t know how we would survive – economically, socially and spiritually. Our family (immediate and extended) is always there to support us; we know they are there. Similarly, the importance of aiga is tied up in the fact that everything we do is in some way to do with our family. Church and social occasions/events are always with the family group, rather than friendship groups. Our support also is always from our family and to our family.

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Culture and the Samoan Woman

Within Samoan culture, the woman is revered and looked up to, not only for moral guidance, but for the norms and practices of Samoan society. Williams talks of the status of females within Samoan society at the first arrival of missionaries on the islands. He notes that the women of Samoan society do not appear to be oppressed or neglected as they had been in Tahiti and other islands the missionaries had visited.\textsuperscript{111} Williams observed that “they appear to be held in high estimation… they also appear to have a good deal of confidence reposed in them by their husbands for I perceive that Malietoa [Vainu’upō] generally passed his property over to one of his wives.”\textsuperscript{112}

This reverence and high status that is given to women is a product of the feagaiga or covenant. This relationship is the product of the narratives of Nafanua, which will be looked at in detail in the following chapter. These narratives are also an excellent way to observe and understand the nature or essence of the Samoan culture. The feagaiga has to do with peaceful relations within both families, and within society as a whole. The brother promises to protect and respect his sister, the sister promises to support and honour her brother. This covenant calls for females of Samoan society to be diplomatic in the use of their veto within family and national discussions. Whilst males make many of the day-to-day decisions within society, women are indeed the executive arm of these decisions. If a decision goes against the will of the women, they are free to exercise the principles of respect and honour that the feagaiga entails.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. p233
The clearest way to explain and understand the *va*, or relationship that rationalizes the *feagaiga*, is through the following flow diagram.

Traditionally, male and female roles within Samoa were strictly adhered to. Women would stay within the house, for example, cleaning and washing clothes. Her brother, on the other hand, would be outside doing all the physical and manual labour. He (the brother) was essentially a servant, ensuring that all his sisters’ needs and wants were catered to.

There is a saying, *E mu mata o le tuagane i lona tuafafine*, the brother will and should always face the fire in the service of his sister.\(^{113}\) This saying, as espoused by Suluga, takes on a double meaning. The obvious meaning is the literal one, brothers do the heavy labour and outside cooking, therefore, they must indeed face the fire for their sisters. The second meaning however, pertains to male and female roles within the socio-political roles within Samoan society and can be explained by discussing the flow diagram above.

The brother and sister, within Samoan society, start out with equal status; the laws and rules that govern the *feagaiga* bind them both. With their equal status in culture, both males and females within society have the same *pule*. *Pule* encompasses aspects such as

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\(^{113}\) Samoan proverbial saying
authority, obligation, responsibility and nurture. This term, or concept, is used as the Samoan equivalent of authority, but includes so much more. *Pule* can also be seen as an individual’s right to act on their own; the right to voice their opinions and their right to freedom of speech and choice.\(^{114}\) What this view of *pule* then gives us is a tiny insight into the importance of the *feagaiga*. A sister will, in many instances, give up her rights, so that her brother might uphold his side of the covenant and prove himself worthy in both the eyes of his sister and of their wider family group.

This is where the roles of the male and female differ and the laws that govern them ask of them different actions and/or reactions. Here, the principles of the *feagaiga* dictate that the woman defers to her brother, and abdicates her right to *pule* placing her decision-making powers and hopes into the hands of her brother. In turn, from the dictates of the *feagaiga*, the male’s role is to take the trust and faith his sister gives him and to make representative decisions on behalf of the family. This explanation makes it sound as if the woman gives up her rights entirely, yet this is not the case. There remains a method of voicing opinion for the woman. Within the principles of the *feagaiga* the Samoan woman is given the prerogative to veto the decision and opinion of her brother, and it is his duty to listen and heed his sister’s opinion. The brother’s role is to ‘face the fire’ within the socio-political realm, both for his sister and in many instances from his sister.

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Following this train of thought, Participant E has said that the relationship that is important to Samoan culture is brother and sister and the ‘boundaries’ that emanate from this relationship. What you do and don’t do is dictated by this relationship and the covenant or *feagaiga* between the two that is embodied by the sister.\(^\text{115}\)

Peggy has said, much in line with the explanation of the *va* or *feagaiga*, that the *feagaiga* sets the boundaries of action between brothers and sisters, between *ausaluma* and *aumaga*, and between pastors and congregation. Respect is the main cement in these processes. Also, women defer to their brothers, while males protect their sisters; it is still a relationship of complementarity.\(^\text{116}\)

In both these views it becomes apparent that rules of the *feagaiga* dictate the permeating and encompassing role and relationship of the brother and sister. Schoeffel talks of the transformation of the institutions of the *feagaiga* in relation to Christian influence in the islands. Schoeffel also talks about the importance and inherent power that is upheld and encompassed by the *feagaiga*, stating that “… The Samoans have a well-known saying, “a sister is the inner corner (*ioimata*) of her brother’s eye”, which expresses the belief that men are vulnerable, socially and spiritually, through their sisters”.\(^\text{117}\)

Participant K talks of a totally different idea of *feagaiga*. Participant K argues that within Samoan understanding and family life, children will always take the social ranking

of their mother. Even if the father is extremely high ranking within society, his children with a lower ranking woman cannot claim his titles.\textsuperscript{118} Participant K then went on to point out that in regards to the special status of sisters, rank is important and relative.

In the \textit{feagaiga}, sisters incorporate the various ideals of dignity, sacredness, honour and grace, which is in stark contrast to their brothers who represent more routine active qualities. What the \textit{feagaiga} essentially recognises is the fact that the rank and heritage of the family’s ancestors are carried by and dispersed through the sisters.\textsuperscript{119}

Growing up, the importance of the \textit{feagaiga} and the relationship between myself and my brother was always an important aspect of any discussion I had with my grandmother. However, it was not until I was much older that I truly understood how this relationship worked and what happens when the relationship is not upheld. The following example is an example from my own life; however, the names have been changed. A few years ago our family was called together to discuss the future and resolve issues that had arisen since the last family meeting. The women in my family are extremely outspoken and opinionated, which makes this example all the more fascinating. During the discussion that ensued, I realised that it was mainly the males in my family that were doing the talking. I was seated next to Sam and his older sister (Sina) was next to him. The longer the conversation went on, the more agitated Sina seemed and out of the corner of my eye I saw her nudging Sam and mouthing the words, “say something!!” Sam, however, remained silent. Shortly after that, Sina spoke up, voicing her opinion, however, the longer she spoke, the more upset she became. Then it finally dawned on me why (1) she was so upset

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
and (2) why she had wanted Sam to speak up for her. Her faith and trust had been put in him to speak on her behalf, but because he had not risen to the occasion, Sina had had to speak for herself, and in doing so, had turned the *feagaiga* upside down. Do not get the wrong impression, Sina is one of the strongest, most educated and opinionated women I know. But because of Sam’s failure to uphold his side of the *feagaiga*, the balance was tipped and Sina was forced, indirectly, to speak out in place of him.

What this example shows us is the idea that no matter how educated and strong-willed a Samoan woman is, they will, above all, maintain their side of the *feagaiga*, as it brings shame not only upon herself but her family, if she does not. It also shows us that if the brother does not speak up on his sister’s behalf, even though there is a certain vexation that comes with the action, the Samoan woman will speak up for herself. She will be heard. It was emotional for Sina, because in Sam failing to speak, she felt that she did not have his respect, his support or his understanding.

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**The Transformation of the Feagaiga and its Importance Today in Samoan Society**

The term *feagaiga* derives from the term *feagai*, which Pratt defines as “To be opposite to each other, to correspond to or dwell together cordially, to be on good terms; as a chief with his people, or a minister with his flock”.¹²⁰ The sacred role of Samoan

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women within the feagaiga is the permeating force that structures and influences the gender roles, even in today’s ‘developed’ and progressive societal system. In the following section I will look at the ways that the role of the feagaiga has changed over time.

**The feagaiga in Historical context**

The feagaiga has regulated and influenced the actions of both Samoan males and females. Whilst in traditional Samoan society the idea of feagaiga was mainly used in relation to chiefly aiga in Samoa, its meaning and practice has filtered down through the nation so that it has come to pass that the feagaiga is used in relation to all Samoans. In historical context, the feagaiga regulated and acknowledged the various rights and obligations of the two family lines; those of the brother, and those of the sister. These two lines are known as the tamafafine (children of the sister) and tamatane (children of the brother).

The distinction, furthermore, was of greatest significance among chiefly āiga, since the exchange of property occurred on the wealth and treasures, such as fine mats and tapa (tōga). The second kind was fixed assets, such as land, houses and the matai titles circulated among, and were available to, all the adult members of the ‘āiga at the discretion of the matai, who was the official custodian of all property. Many argue that because women held, in essence, very little political power within society that they were oppressed and ruled over, however, as Schoeffel points out, women’s role was connected mainly with their sacred status,

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121 Ibid.
122 Ibid. p92
 …despite the high position of chiefly women and their prominence in mythology, women rarely had political power. What power they had was associated with their sacred ancestry and their role in dynastic succession. 123

Because of this sacred status, women held much power, not only over males in the political sphere, but over Samoan thought and world view.

It is clear that in pre-Christian Samoa, women had played an important and possibly equal role with men in religious life, as priests, spirit mediums and deities. In the nineteenth century Williams recorded that the despotic and supernaturally powerful chief of Manono, Leiataua Tamafaiga, was to have been succeeded after his assassination by his daughter. 124

The feagaiga, in its institutional form was made up of two separate, but equal, groups. The two groups that symbolized the feagaiga in its purest form were those of the nu’u o tama’ita’i (village of females) and the nu’u o ali’i (village of men). 125 From the above quotes and discussion, the feagaiga appears as the permeating factor that indeed acted as the glue for Samoan society as a whole. Through the feagaiga, individuals were afforded protection, safety and respect. The feagaiga also acted to let people know where they stood within wider society, where they were from and, in a large part, helped people to identify themselves both as individuals and as part of a larger community.

The feagaiga in a contemporary context.

In its context of kinship the term feagaiga expresses the relationship between sisters and brothers and between kin-groups defined as the

123 Ibid. p93
124 Ibid. p95
125 Ibid.
descendants of sister (tamafafine) and brothers (tamatāne)... The Samoans have a well-known saying, "a sister is the inner corner (ioimata) of her brother’s eye", which expresses the belief that men are vulnerable, socially and spiritually, through their sisters.  

Here, Schoeffel illustrates the ideals that are espoused throughout the entirety of this thesis. The ioimata in the Samoan context is the most vulnerable part of the body; it is also one of the most important body parts. With Samoan women being referred to as the ioimata, the role and position of the Samoan woman is being demonstrated. The ioimata, much like Samoan women, enables sight and understanding. In this context, it can be taken then, that women enable males to see clearly and fairly. They also bring to the table a versatility that ensures things get done and in a fashion that benefits everyone. As Suluga points out, this is how the women see and understand this saying. However, from the male perspective, the ioimata, being one of the most vulnerable parts of the body, must be protected, respected and cared for at all costs, as once it is lost, or damaged, it cannot be repaired, re-grown or renewed.  

In everyday life in modern Samoa, consideration for sister is shown in the more privileged treatment of adolescent girls in comparison with their brothers. For example, girls are given more comfortable sleeping quarters, and the household division of labour between male and female adolescents ideally allocated light, indoor work to girls and heavy, outdoor work to boys. Boys may roam freely around the village and its environs, constrained only by the demands on their labour, but their sisters are subject to many

126 Ibid. p88
129 Ibid.
restrictions. For example, it is common for girls, when they leave their homes, to be accompanied by younger children as chaperones.\(^{130}\)

Another aspect of the *feagaiga* in a contemporary context can be observed through the interactions of Samoan adults in the decision making process. As Schoeffel argues,

\[\ldots\text{it is in this sphere that moral and spiritual authority of sisters through the feagaiga relationship with their brothers may be most readily perceived. The sanction of the sister’s “curse” is referred to often in the literature on Samoa. However, there is no need for a sister actually to verbally or formally curse her brother in order to bring misfortune upon him. It may result, involuntarily as it were, from her feelings of anger if she is disregarded by him.}\(^{131}\]

The anger of the sister is a powerful phenomenon, and it is imperative that males uphold their end of the *feagaiga*, because, if not, the female curse comes into play. Growing up, my grandmother used to always tell me to be careful with what I said to my brothers when they angered me, as what I uttered was very powerful, and in a way would be like speaking into their lives. If what I said in anger was negative, my grandmother would point out, very quickly, that I was cursing them, and must guard my tongue. From a very young age, I have understood the power I wield over my brothers, not only with the *feagaiga* in mind, but through the blessings I can both give and take away.

\[^{130}\text{Ibid. p88 - 89}\]
\[^{131}\text{Ibid. p89 - 90}\]
The Religious Transformation of the *feagaiga*

Across Polynesia, as missionaries began to spread the gospel and travel extensively, women were seen as being oppressed. Hereafter Samoa was no different from this. In writing about Samoa, Williams prayed that:

...by the blessing of God upon our labours, the day might speedily arrive when these interesting females should be elevated from this terrible degradation, and, by the benign influence of Christianity, be raised to the dignity of companionship with their husbands, and occupy that status in the social and domestic circle which females of Tahiti, Rarotonga, and the other islands, have attained since the introduction of the Gospel.\(^{132}\)

The Christianity that was spread across Samoa gave emphasis to the idea that a woman’s proper station in life is and was as an aid to her husband. Upon arrival in Samoa, missionaries were extremely vexed at the non-existence of stable marriages and solid relationships between men and women.\(^{133}\) Missionaries observed that wives held a much lower status in Samoan society and could not understand how women were used as bartering chips in the everyday transactions of males of Samoan society. Missionaries believed that this lack of voice and lack of choice on the woman’s part had one very simple solution; the acceptance of Christianity and especially Christian marriage, would combat this low status, and afford women a better position in society.\(^{134}\) As Schoeffel points out:

Since Christian marriage emphasized ties of affection and individual choice of partner, they believed acceptance of wifehood as a more honourable estate would be to the advantage of women.\(^{135}\)

\(^{132}\) Ibid. p102
\(^{133}\) Ibid.
\(^{134}\) Ibid.
\(^{135}\) Ibid. p102 - 103
The Samoan woman exists in two overlapping but very separate realms. She is both sister and wife. As a wife, the woman’s status is inextricably interconnected with the status and role of her husband. As a sister, the Samoan woman acts as the honour and pride of her family; she is protected, respected and honoured all under the laws of the feagaiga. What these missionaries did not fully understand or realize however, was that in exalting the role of Samoan woman as wife and her resulting decline in importance as a sister would be immensely detrimental to the status of women in Samoan society. In an instance where they first hoped to do good, they in fact gave rise to a great neglect and depreciation of Samoan tradition and culture.\textsuperscript{136}

An important aspect of the feagaiga is the aualuma, the group of young unmarried women within the village, as they are the sister group to the men’s aumaga. Missionaries condemned the institution and function of the aualuma as it enabled young unmarried women to reside away from their family and/or former husbands.\textsuperscript{137} The arrival and acceptance of Christianity saw to it that rather than being sent to join the aualuma when a girl came of age, she was sent to live, learn and serve in the pastor’s house. A daughter who came from a Christian background was sent to the pastor’s home so that she could find, in the pastor’s wife, an example or role model of what it was to be a good Christian woman. Missionaries as a response to the cultural activities of the aualuma attempted to replace this institution with women’s groups that functioned to support the church and pastor’s family as well as the fono a matai, ‘council of chiefs’ within the village.\textsuperscript{138}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{136}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{137}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{138}] Ibid.
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have had an immense effect on the concept and understanding of the term *feagaiga*, as Schoeffel rightly points out:

The term *feagaiga* now has a widely understood, secular, everyday meaning as a term for a bargain or contract and also as a more special, sacred meaning in the context of the church. Christianity removed the divine descent criterion that provided legitimacy for the exalted rank and privileges of aristocrats... and the authority of chiefs declined to secular leadership of families in village-level governments. Through the same process of ideological transformation, gender relations have changed. Separate sororal and fraternal spheres of authority and reciprocal rights and duties have little recognition today, and while the mystical powers of the *feagaiga* are less exercised by women, they have taken small steps into the previously masculine domain of secular political action.\(^{139}\)

**Women’s Role in the Village**

Within the Samoan villages there are two factions that make up the village as an entirety; there is the village of the men, and the village of the women.\(^{140}\) Each village or faction has prestige and status in the areas they are in charge of and their status is equal within these two groups.\(^{141}\) Whatever roles and status there are for men, there are corresponding roles and status that are held and carried out by the village of women. The women’s village is comprised of three main groups. These groups are the *aualuma*, which is made up of the daughters and sisters of the chiefs, the second is the *faletua ma tausi*, who are the wives of the village *matai*, and the third consists of the wives of the untitled men of

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\(^{139}\) Ibid. p106
the village.\textsuperscript{142} So, from this explanation of the women’s village, there are two permeating roles for women in Samoan society, that of sister and that of wife.

\textit{Aualuma, Faletua ma Tausi and the wives of untitled men}

This section undertakes an in-depth discussion of the roles and institutions supported and maintained by these groups of women. From the roles of these groups we can see the participation of women within every aspect of village life and cultural practice.

The term \textit{aualuma}, when translated is simply a combination of the words \textit{le au i luma} meaning the group at the front.\textsuperscript{143} Milner defines the \textit{aualuma} as a “[s]emi-formal association of unmarried women in each village, who used to organize the reception of visitors, minister to the Taupou, and perform several other duties”.\textsuperscript{144} This first translation can mean several different ideas. The first of these ideas is the literal meaning that the members of the \textit{aualuma} sit at the front, and participate in discussions, that they are acknowledged within the village and cultural setting and that their voices are heard.\textsuperscript{145} However, in saying this, the term could mean the people that are seen up front serving, hosting and catering to the needs of their brothers and guests. The second meaning of this translation can suggest that the members of the \textit{aualuma} hold higher rank and status than the \textit{faletua ma tausi}, and that their welfare takes precedence over that of the wives of the village matai.

\textsuperscript{143} Personal knowledge
There is a second meaning the Samoan dictionary accords to the concept of *ausaluma*, and it is that of the male organ, or penis. Here we are thrust into a discussion of the symbolism and possible reasons behind the use of the term *ausaluma* (penis) as a way of labelling women within Samoan society. There are many reasons this may have happened. The explanations below are my own speculations on this topic. What does the male organ symbolise and why was it used to connote the women that comprise the *ausaluma*? This term may have been used to demonstrate the power, domination and authority of a village whose *ausaluma* was strong and had many members. This may have been a reflection of the complementarity and attachment of women to Samoan males, expressing through their women male virility, strength and masculinity. This also brings to the fore, older ideas of sexuality and fertility, whereby the penis represents the fertility and the strength of both males and females. Tui Atua talks of the circumcision of young Samoan males in traditional times illustrating another important idea behind the use of the term *ausaluma*, saying that:

In the circumcision of young boys, a piece of wood is inserted between the soft flesh and the hard flesh. There is masterbation in order to harden the penis, facilitating cutting with a bamboo knife. If in the process of masterbation, the penis spurts semen, the circumcisors eat the semen, because semen symbolises the essence and pinnacle of life.

In the above context, it is important to emphsise the idea that the *ausaluma* are the young women of the village who are ready to be married and move away from their families.

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in order to better their family and village status. Here another form of symbolism becomes apparent. If the young women are seen as the penis, then the children, that are yet to be born, can also be seen as the semen. There is the understanding that the semen from a male is essential in the production of offspring. If this were to be transposed to the situation of women, then women are essential not only to the literal production of offspring, but are very much essential to the existence and Samoan life and understanding. It may also be because women receive the semen and in turn create life from it, bringing forth a new generation of life, understanding knowledge and life experiences to come. Samoan culture is very much a culture of life and the celebration of this life, as Tui Atua illustrates by using Samoan death and funeral customs as an example:

Samoans have a culture of death and a culture of dying. In our funeral rites, we celebrate life and spurn mourning. We celebrate our past victories against the celestials and flaunt in chant and ritual our power to reproduce as a gesture of dismissing death because we have the power to make a new person. The principle objective of our funeral rites is to lift us into an emotional high in which life is equated with death and life and death become one and equal.  

In light of the above quote a Samoan woman’s role takes on a new meaning. Women become the vehicle in which Samoans can become gods as the eternal cycle of life that encompasses Samoan understanding is centered on the idea of giving life. Women are the talisman that males flaunt, because in women, males can not only dismiss death but become a part of something pure, something miraculous and good. They can, in essence, give life to another human being through the vehicle of the woman.

148 Ibid. p66
The group of women that comprise the social group of *faletua ma tausi* are the wives of *matai*. What are the meanings behind the term *faletua ma tausi*? There are also several meanings to this concept, as with most concepts in the Samoan language. The terms *faletua* and *tausi* are simply translated as meaning the chief or pastor’s wife and the nurturer. However, as Aiono argues, there is a literal translation of *faletua* that is raised periodically to show the subordination of women within Samoan society. This meaning is a break down of the word *faletua*, taking the word *fale* to mean house and the word *tua* to mean back. Following this argument, the women of this group become the ‘back-house’.

While this meaning fits in with the translation of the *aualuma* above as the group at the front, this is not the meaning that is given to the ‘back-house’. However, while many focus on the negative meaning that is given to the idea of the ‘back-house’, this is in fact not a negative concept. There are several meanings that I have been given from my grandmother that could indeed counter the negative meaning given above. The first of these is that the woman is the support of the house, and in village terms, she is the support that the chief cannot do without. The second idea is that the term *faletua* could have come from the term *tuafale*, which means the backyard, or area behind the house, which, in traditional times was where women worked on their fine mats and handicrafts.

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Village Committees

During the New Zealand government’s administration of the Samoan nation and people, they helped villages set up committees that would be responsible for village hygiene, sanitation, child-care and later on the supply of water.¹⁵³ However, more recently these responsibilities have been extended to include income generating activities, such as handcraft workshops and raising awareness of women’s roles within the political sphere.¹⁵⁴ The long-established traditions of Samoa are no longer affording the crucial support system for many women and children as they did in traditional times, and so women are looking towards other ways of countering the many changes they have to face. The women of modern Samoa are at a transition stage; whilst they maintain and advocate their traditional practices and ideals, the women of Samoa are at the same time trying to balance their desire to maintain their culture with the options and ideals that progress and development are bringing along with them.¹⁵⁵

These village committees are in charge of childcare, the village water supply, the women are in charge of running and organising village health centres and workshops and they are instrumental in the organization and running of the village schools.¹⁵⁶ The women’s committees also ensure the safety, happiness, purity and sanctity of the village

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.
taupou ‘village virgin’, and take under their wing the young tama’ita’i and aualuma of the village. In essence, these women’s committees run the village and their influence reaches every aspect of village life.

Throughout the history of Samoa, women within culture have been both protected and revered. They are the apple of their brothers’ eye. Women within Samoan culture, whether in pre-Christian or modern times, hold a role that bridges the gap between the spiritual and secular, they are the glue that holds the family, village and in turn nation together. When looking at all aspects of Samoan culture, as a way of life and understanding, it becomes apparent that women play an integral part in all these contexts. The following chapter will be looking at the narratives of a series of important females in Samoan history as a means of gauging the traditional roles and status of women as leaders, sisters and daughters; not only within the societal context, but also within the realm of traditional religion. With a strong focus on the narratives of Nafanua and Salamasina, a discussion will ensue on the role of Samoan women as daughters, leaders and wives. The permeating focus of Salamasina’s life and reign was the fostering of morality, the preservation of peace and the maintenance of Samoan custom. Salamasina, throughout her illustrious life determined to do her utmost to achieve the freedoms, celebratory customs and good relations Samoans enjoy to this day.
Chapter Three
Samoan Mythology, History and the Role of Women as Wives and Daughters

This chapter will look at Samoan mythology, history and culture, and the roles that women play within these contexts. The importance of re-examining Samoan mythology and history lies in the inadequacy of current written works on the traditional role of women. From this study of the role of women in Samoan mythology we can indeed see a reflection of the way Samoan women were viewed and their roles in traditional Samoan society. Whilst Samoans, and in fact many Pacific peoples, are called the children of Tagaloa,\textsuperscript{157} women played an extremely important and practical role in the narratives of creation.

Before discussing the mythology of Nafanua and the historical accounts of Salamasina, there needs to be some form of explanation on the difference between mythology and history. Mythology has much to do with the understanding and acknowledgment of the spiritual side of the Samoan psyche. Within Samoan mythology there is ample use of terms such as \textit{aitu} and \textit{atua} ‘gods and spirits’. For Western scholars, Samoan history has generally been understood as the recollection and study of written factual events concerning our interactions with the Western world. Today this written history is slowly being reclaimed by Samoans as our own. Ron and Marjorie Crocombe

\textsuperscript{157}Tagaloa is the creator of creations, the all powerful male deity that brought about the creation of the world and conception of man.
make a point in their study of the Cook Islands that stands true for all pacific ideals of past and the honor given to our ancestors:

We have a strength that has been built on our awareness of our past. Our past is our present, and our present is our future.\textsuperscript{158}

To the Samoan people history is not what is written in books, it is not only something we read about and attempt to understand from shared experiences. History is lived. History, in the Samoan context, takes on the characteristics and traits of a living thing. It teaches, it tells stories and shows feelings. History does not only look at events and actions of individuals; in many cases, history becomes those individuals and looks at the world through their eyes. The history of Samoa is chronicled in songs, dance movements, proverbial sayings and stories. These chronicles of Samoan history are mentioned and used in everyday Samoan life. Knowledge, as they say, is a powerful thing, and knowledge of Samoan history is demonstrated through one’s adeptness at reciting Samoan genealogy and various accounts of Samoan mythology. Samoan mythology is the Samoan account of Samoa’s heritage, legacy and history. As Barthes argues, the fundamental idea of mythology is that myth is simply the conversion of ‘history into nature’.\textsuperscript{159} The ideals of Samoan history and mythology merge to a point where we can no longer separate what is fact, and what is fiction. Both Samoan history and mythology, as they are indeed the same,


\textsuperscript{159} Taouma, Lisa (2004). ‘Gauguin is Dead... There is no Paradise’. \textit{Journal of Intercultural Studies}. 25(1). p41
serve the same purpose; to uplift, encourage, teach and better future generations of Samoans.

The following chapter will be looking at the narratives of Nafanua, her ancestry, and the observations and understanding of the role of women in traditional Samoan society. This chapter will also be looking at the role of Samoan women as wives and daughters in relation to the mythology of Nafanua, the history of Salamasina and other Samoan narratives. While written sources have been included, all the stories told within this chapter are recollections of stories told to me as a child. These written sources, therefore, are supplementary documents employed to support my own cultural knowledge.

_Talisoa le i’a a Nafanua ‘wait for the assistance and benevolence of Nafanua’_

The reason I focus on the narratives of Nafanua is explained by the continuing reference in today’s Samoan society to her, both in everyday life and in the more ceremonial aspect of Samoan life. There are many stories that focus on Nafanua; however, this section will concentrate on three popular narratives. Many linguistic references and many _fa’alupega_, or Samoan proverbial sayings or expressions, are products of these narratives on Nafanua. These proverbial understandings and expressions will be discussed later on with respect to women in Samoa. However, the following section will merely outline Nafanua’s narratives and the many ideas of the traditional role of Samoan women that can be gleaned from these tales. It has been argued that the story or narratives of
Nafanua have given legitimacy to the power base and authority wielded within the realm of traditional Samoan politics.\textsuperscript{160} Liua’ana also points out that the narratives of Nafanua give validity, meaning and mana to the Tafa’i'fā, the four kingship titles of Samoa, as it was Nafanua who was instrumental in the acquisition and allocation of these royal titles.\textsuperscript{161} The influence and presence of Nafanua within Samoa’s pre-Christian beliefs and narratives has also influenced the circumstances of the tama-a-aiga, or the sons of these royal lines, especially when looking in particular at the Tupua and Malietoa titles and subsequent lineages.\textsuperscript{162}

Nafanua, in many cases, is seen as an authentic person who played a vital part in Samoan history, however, in many recollections of Nafanua’s life, she is seen as an aitu or atua ‘spirit or goddess’, who would inhabit the body of her priests. Because Samoan culture and history are very much based on individual interpretation and oral transmission, there is no possible way of stating whether she was one or the other. She is, however, an integral part of understanding the way women in Samoa are seen, treated and ultimately behave.

Nafanua’s family was situated in and reigned over Pulotu.\textsuperscript{163} Pulotu is the Samoan term for the underworld, however, as Tu’u’u mentions, in traditional times the term Pulotu

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{163} Tu’u’u, Misilugi (2001). \textit{Rulers of Samoa Islands & their legends and decrees}. Wellington: Tuga'ula. p349
also expanded to encompass the western side of the island of Savai‘i. Nafanua’s lineage traces back to Tagaloalagi, the highest chief of all the heavens who married the daughter of the god of the wind, who then gave birth to the “progenitoress of the Pulotu line”, Si’usi’uao. The most important aspect of telling the tales of Samoan mythology is the ideas of blood lines, or genealogical ties, and therefore, the lineage of Nafanua will be outlined in the following section, as well as the stories told to Samoans, in order to explain the phenomena now understood as Samoan culture and familial relationships. The following table highlights an important aspect of Samoan genealogy. It shows that mana, or cultural power, is not only passed down through the male line, but emphasizes that Samoans have the ability to trace their heritage back through both the father’s and mother’s lines.

165 Ibid. p349; Hovdhaugen, Even (1987), From the Land of Nafanua; Oslo: Norwegian University Press.
Nafanua was the result of an incestuous union between her uncle Saveasi’uleo and one of his nieces, either Tilafaiga or Taema. Mythology is no longer clear about which sister married Saveasi’uleo, however, one of the sisters married Saveasi’uleo in Pulotu and they had a child.

The Ancestry of Nafanua

Nafanua is descended from Tagaloalagi, the creator of all things and god of the heavens. Tagaloalagi’s daughter, Si’usi’uao, is known as the “progenitoress of the Pulotu line” of Nafanua’s ancestry.\(^{167}\) Si’usi’uao gave birth to a son named Popoto who brought forth a daughter Falelupe. Falelupe gave birth to a son named Fa’atoia, Fa’atoia fathered a son named Pulea who in turn sired Alao.

Alao and Taufailematagi (Taufa) met when Taufa was sent by her father Papatea to fetch water, and decided to marry.\(^{168}\) Alao and Taufa gave birth to various children, including two sons, Saveasi’uleo and Salevao. Saveasi’uleo, who was born as a blood clot, turned into an eel, and Salevao, who appeared to be dead at birth, was found the next day to be alive. Both Saveasi’uleo and Salevao proceeded to greedily eat their siblings.\(^ {169}\) The brothers continued to eat their siblings until finally, one day Alao and Taufa fled to Falealupo, a village in Savai’i and there was born to them another son, Ulufanuasese’e. Growing up, he had many close encounters with his brothers. One day, Ulufanuasese’e was only narrowly saved from the evil intentions of his brother Saveasi’uleo, by his ever-watchful parents.\(^ {170}\) After this close encounter, Alao and Taufa fled inland to hide in the bush, so that their son might be given a chance at life. One day, as Ulufanuasese’e was climbing a tree, he looked out above the treetops and saw the ocean. Upon asking his parents, they explained to him that what he saw was the ocean and that they had fled

\(^{167}\) Tu’u’u, Misilugi (2001). *Rulers of Samoa Islands & their legends and decrees*. Wellington: Tuga’ula. p349
\(^{168}\) Ibid. p125
\(^{169}\) Ibid. p125
\(^{170}\) Ibid. p125
because his brothers had attacked and killed his siblings and that they feared for his life. Ulufanuasese’e wanted to journey to the sea, however, his parents forbade him. One day, Ulufanuasese’e decided to disobey his parents, and went to the ocean, where he began to surf the waves. Saveasi’uleo, seeing his brother riding the waves, followed him and as he passed him on a wave he tried to take a bite out of Ulufanuasese’e. Ulufanuasese’e, realising what his brother was attempting to do, rushed to the beach and stood there facing his elder brother, angry, and accused his brother of trying to devour him. Salevao, realising that he could not reach Ulufanuasese’e, and that he had indeed managed to escape him, felt remorse and apologised. This story is the source of the Samoans ‘Decree of the Vast Seas’ where Saveasi’uleo promises to make atonement by leaving the ocean and finding some other place to live, and promises his brother that they shall meet again in their children.

The brothers then separated and Ulufanuasese’e grew up and married, siring twin daughters, Tilafaiga and Taema, who were, in all accounts, conjoint twins. These two sisters are extremely important in the narratives of Samoa’s history and the arrival of tattooing and other important aspects of Samoan culture and tradition; however, their role within Nafanua’s ancestry is of utmost significance. It is through the daughters of Ulufanuasese’e that Saveasi’uleo’s decree came true. One of the daughters, it is hard to say which one as narratives differ on this aspect, married Saveasi’uleo and gave birth to

171 Ibid. p352
172 Ibid. p353
173 Ibid.
Nafanua and her sister Suaifanua.\textsuperscript{175} And so, Nafanua was the result of an incestuous union between her uncle Saveasi’uleo and one of his nieces, either Tilafaiga or Taema.

From the narratives of Nafanua’s ancestry and the conflict between the three brothers, we can see the relationship that exists between brothers. It is this relationship that makes the role of the woman or sister so important within Samoan society. From this narrative, brothers are not only indifferent to each other but are also in conflict, and in turn threaten both the unity and stability of their family and wider society. Women, on the other hand, through their genealogy and ability to give birth work to strengthen the unity and ‘happiness’ of the family.\textsuperscript{176}

The Narratives of Nafanua

The first of the two narratives of Nafanua is one of the most common and well-known narratives of Nafanua and talks of bravery, duty and justice. The following account, whilst documented in written works, is in fact an oral account told to me as a child by my grandmother.

A long time ago there was a war between two great families, and after having won the battle the victorious faction proceeded to subjugate and torture their rivals. There was a chief named Tai’i whose people were being forced into servitude and one day he cried out for his people. Nafanua and her father who were then living in Pulotu heard his cries and

\textsuperscript{175} Tu’u’u, Misilugi (2001). \textit{Rulers of Samoa Islands & their legends and decrees}. Wellington: Tuga’ula. p355

after having heard these cries Nafanua went to her father, saying my duty is to my people, let me go and help them. Many doubted her capabilities, however, Nafanua was quick to respond dispelling any fears and her father had brought before her three war clubs that were named for the type of warrior who would wield them. The three clubs were named 

*Fa‘aulito* ‘no mercy’, *Ulimasao* ‘guide with safety’ and *Tafesilafa‘i* ‘strike with courtesy’.

Nafanua, after perusing all three clubs, chose *Tafesilafa‘i* ‘strike with courtesy’ as that was the way she wanted to fight the battle. Nafanua went to where her people were enslaved and assembled them, ready to fight the next morning. As her people were readying themselves, Nafanua said to them, stay on this side of the road, if anyone should cross over to the other side I will attack them. She also made very clear that if someone were to surrender, they were not to be harmed, but were to be sent home. The final point Nafanua drove home was that they were to chase only their opposition so far. Once they reached the boundaries of their village they were to stop, as this was a battle of freedom not of oppression. As the battle commenced, Nafanua took her club to one of her own in punishment as they had crossed to the other side of the road while chasing an opposing warrior. This is where Samoans have gotten the saying *Ua ola i fale le lāau a Nafanua* ‘the club of Nafanua is used on her own’.

The second narrative of Nafanua that I want to retell relates to the *feagaiga*, or the covenant between a brother and his sister, which in reality dictates the very nature or essence of the *fa’asamoia* and the ways in which men and women relate to each other. This account of Nafanua was also told to me by my grandmother and was used as a means of making my young mind understand the importance and significance of the relationship between my brothers and me.
Nafanua in many accounts was a cannibal, and this story stems from the acceptance of this fact. In a time long since past Nafanua was wandering through a coconut plantation and saw a young man climbing a coconut tree. His body was well proportioned and his skin was a golden brown. Nafanua, feeling her hunger, decided to capture him for her dinner. As she attacked the young man he cried out to Nafanua: “Why do you attack me? What an evil sister you are to try and eat me!” It was then that Nafanua realised the young man she was about to slay was indeed her own brother. Nafanua then made a promise to always respect, listen to and heed her brother; in return, her brother promised to protect and consult his sister on all undertakings. And so it remains to this day in Samoan culture, life and understanding.

A third narrative on Nafanua is the story of the thatching of a Samoan fale or house in Falealupo, a village in Savaii, the power base of Nafanua’s government. This proverb is mentioned by many Samoan academics as a way of understanding the nature of the relationship and role of women within Samoan society in relation to men:177 E au le ina’ilau a tama’ita’i ‘the ladies row of thatch is complete’. This saying resonates with the diligence, consistency and hard working nature of Samoan women. In the village of Falealupo, there was a house called Ina’ilau, its name referring to the incomplete thatching on the house.178 Nafanua, wanting this house for herself, ordered the males of the village to complete the building of the house, however, the women of Falealupo disagreed saying that they believed they could complete the building faster than the men, and do a much better

Nafanua then challenged both the men and the women, showing them what she wanted done; she then left them to carry out the task in competition with each other. The women set to work immediately. The men on the other hand slowly went about collecting the materials they needed and took their time, as they believed there was no way the women could finish by the end of the day. However, much to the surprise and humiliation of the males of Falealupo, the women completed their side of the building before sunset, and the males, due to their slow start, could not complete their thatching before the day ended.

The Perception of Samoan Women from the Tales of Nafanua

From the tales of Nafanua outlined above we can gauge the traditional role and expectations placed upon Samoan women. As there are few written accounts of the nature, expectations and roles of Samoan women in pre-Christian Samoa, there is an understanding, or agreement, between indigenous researchers that in order to understand the role of women, we can indeed examine the roles given to women within both the creation mythology and narratives of Samoa’s past. From the narratives of Nafanua, we can gain an insight into ideals such as those of fairness, justice, accountability, compassion and duty. How do these ideals affect the perception of Samoan women today? They provide tangible evidence that women had as much right to justice and as many obligatory

179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
duties as men did. Women felt the need and were given the opportunity to effect change and have a voice within wider Samoan society.

From my own understanding and interpretation of the narratives of Nafanua as told to me as a young child, the following characteristics are inherent to the understanding of both the story of Nafanua, and the role of women in traditional Samoan society. From these narratives we see the empathy Nafanua feels for her people. Her ability to relate to, feel for and understand the pain, the problems and the sorrow of her family reflects the ability of Samoan women to acknowledge and feel the pain of their children, their parents, their siblings and their spouse. Samoan women, in this sense, because of their ability to feel and acknowledge these emotions are the best people to act as negotiators and problem solvers, ironing out rifts between family members and acting as the family peace-makers.

Through Nafanua’s choice of club (tafesilafa ‘i), we see the compassion and mercy that is inherent in the life and role of the Samoan women. Nafanua, in her choice of club, emphasized her decision to be a merciful warrior, in that she opted to fight a battle of freedom and justice, not of revenge and persecution. The Samoan woman in traditional times was a peacemaker and diplomat. Her role is one of fairness not one of judgment and brings to mind a section from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*:

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from Heaven
Upon the place beneath, It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

The third aspect of the narrative of Nafanua that is essential to the understanding of the Samoan women is her duty and decisiveness under pressure. When hearing of the plight of her people, Nafanua felt a sense of duty, and moved heaven and earth so that her people could be free. The feagaiga that is mentioned throughout this thesis talks of the roles of women as sisters. This role involves the understanding of duty, both the sister’s duty to her brother, that of respect, the ability to give sound advice and support, and the brother’s duty towards his sister, duties that incorporate protection, respect and his ability to listen to his sister’s advice. The decisiveness mentioned earlier refers to the Samoan women’s ability to carry out well nigh impossible tasks against insurmountable odds, illustrated by Nafanua’s defeat of the oppressors in Falealupo.

These narratives illustrate the ideals of practicality, discipline and consistency emphasizing the importance of these characteristics in Samoan society. There is a realism of sorts in the expectations, actions, understanding and desire of Nafanua to make a change in her environment. Nafanua simply stated what she wanted to do, how she wanted to get the job done, and then she went about doing exactly what needed to be done to obtain the desired outcome. Samoan women are extremely resourceful and practical; they use what is available to them, and perform little miracles every day. There is a great amount of

discipline required within this desire to act on behalf of her (Nafanua’s) people and family. The reason I mention consistency is the fact that I believe consistency has much to do with the ideal of diligence. Nafanua was diligent in her pursuit of fairness and justice, however, diligence has a touch of humanity within its meaning. Nafanua, as mentioned above, chose to be merciful, and in my own understanding, this diligence is a combination of consistency and care for the welfare and humanity of those around you. This consistency is seen in the narrative of Nafanua through the proverbial expression ‘ua ola i fale le laau a Nafanua’, ‘the club of Nafanua is used on her own’, where we see that there is fairness and justice for all at Nafanua’s hand. The Samoan woman is influential in showing mercy to those who have wronged members of her family; she is the one that apologizes on behalf of her children, her brother or her father. Samoan women are not only the pride and reputation of their family, as mentioned by Tagaloa, but are also, from the narratives of Nafanua, the conscience of their family.

The idea of women as the conscience of their family is well illustrated in an event that happened when I was very young. It caught my attention so much that to this day it is as clear as if it were yesterday. There is a practice in Samoan culture called the ifoga. This practice operates on the principle of non-violent confrontation and seeks to settle disputes through humility and shame as opposed to the argument of an eye for an eye. Ifoga is

186 Personal knowledge
derived from the term *ifo*, meaning to bow down, humbling yourself, whether to others or to God when in the religious context: ¹⁸⁷

…most often victimized individuals, families, organizations or governments are rarely satisfied until the guilty party has been appropriately punished. The Samoans, however, have found it possible within a non-violent cultural framework to provide for an option of apology and forgiveness, leading to continued harmonious relationships between and among those concerned. ¹⁸⁸

During the *ifoga*, the apologizing party will cover themselves in fine mats and sit outside the house of the family who has been wronged. In extreme cases, the victim’s family do not acknowledge the *ifoga* for days. Growing up, I remember an instance where a young man (Sam) from our village was murdered by another young man (Toa) from the next village over. ¹⁸⁹ Before sunrise Toa’s family came and sat in front of my uncle’s house (as he was the village *matai*) and covered themselves in fine mats. They remained there for hours, until my uncle came out and invited them into the house. They removed the fine mats, and to everyone’s surprise, the leader of the *ifoga* was their chief’s wife (Sina). While her husband had not chosen to undertake the Samoan version of apology, Sina had taken it upon herself to organize her family, humble herself and plead with our family, through our *matai*, for forgiveness.

Women, within the Samoan system, while strong and proud, are also ready to undertake any and all means of maintaining family peace, harmony and good name. In the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p384
¹⁸⁹ Names have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.

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above example, Sina, in organizing her family and humbling herself in front of ours, maintained not only their collective conscience but also upheld the ‘good name’ of their family within Samoan cultural etiquette. Nafanua teaches us to be strong leaders, to stand up for those who need us, to be merciful, to maintain the balance and to heed the principles of not only balance, but also service, peace, diligence, mercy, strength, courage and family.

Samoan women are born leaders; they are the diplomats and negotiators of Samoan society, and this concept is illustrated through the leadership of Nafanua, even in the face of adversity. Nafanua was strong, decisive and efficient; however, she did not let the heat of battle overtake her desire for justice, freedom and peace. Battle and annihilation were not the aims of her campaign, war was the final resort, and because war was necessary, she decided that even though she had to fight, she did not have to fight by their rules. Behind the many arguments for Samoan women not to be involved in Samoan politics is the idea that politics are dirty, and that only men can fight by the rules that govern politics. However, Samoan women counter this idea by saying that because they do not fight by the same rules does not mean that they cannot participate. Women in traditional Samoan society were very much involved in the politics of the pre-Christian nation.


The most important role of the Samoan woman is also encapsulated in the second narrative of Nafanua. The role of the Samoan woman as the *feagaiga*, or covenant, is of utmost importance. The Samoan woman is the evidence of this covenant between males and females of traditional Samoan society, and this covenant permeates all relationships within the Samoan nation.\(^{192}\) It is her respect, support and veto that make this covenant so important within the Samoan view.\(^{193}\) There are no exceptions to this rule. All Samoans are included within this relationship, whether you are from a family of single sex siblings, or an only child, members of the extended family are taken to fulfil the role of brother or sister.\(^{194}\)

*O le ioit mata po o le mea uliuli i le mata o le tuagane lana Feagaiga…* ‘The Feagaiga or sister is the ‘pupil of the eye’ of the brother’.\(^{195}\)

The *feagaiga* sets the boundaries of action between brothers and sisters, between *aualuma* and *aumaga* and between pastors and congregation. Respect is the main cement in these processes.\(^{196}\) This covenant calls for females of Samoan society to be diplomatic in the use of their veto within family and national discussions. Whilst males make many of the day to day decisions within society, women are indeed the executive arm of these processes.


\(^{194}\) Ibid.


decisions. And if a decision goes against the will of the women, they are free to exercise
the principles of respect and honour that the *feagaiga* entails.\(^{197}\)

It is more than a contract or an agreement, especially and because it is not
written on paper stone or tablet but into the hearts and minds of the Samoan
peoples... The sister is respected, protected and looked up to by the brothers
and all the male relations.\(^{198}\)

Any role or position within society comes with responsibilities. The *feagaiga* also comes
with responsibilities and is not made up only of the privilege and status that has been
mentioned previously. The first of these responsibilities, as Tagaloa outlines, is the
female’s responsibility towards the maintenance of the peaceful and happy relationship
between the males of the family.\(^{199}\) The female, in the role of the *feagaiga*, is also seen as
the *pae* or *auli* ‘post or iron’ as it is she that straightens, irons and smoothes out any
problems or conflicts within her family.\(^{200}\) This idea is also supported by Participant H who
argues that one of the most important and most visible roles of females within her
immediate family, and by extension the political environment, is to be the *pae or auli*. This
means the females of the family must negotiate and mediate all adverse situations that may
arise.\(^{201}\)

The second responsibility that Tagaloa mentions in relation to the Samoan covenant
or *feagaiga* is the production and provision of material wealth that can be utilised by their

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\(^{197}\) Ibid.

\(^{198}\) Tagaloa, Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le (n.d.). ‘The Social Status and the Economic Roles of the Females in
Traditional and Modern Samoan Society’. Samoa: National University of Samoa (Univesite-o-Samoa).

\(^{199}\) Ibid.

\(^{200}\) Ibid.

brothers during the ceremonial aspects of Samoan life where exchanges and gifts are essential for the smooth operation.\textsuperscript{202} Amongst these practices are the ifoga, the conferring of matai titles, marriages, births and deaths to name a few.

Finally, in Tagaloa’s words the third and most important responsibility of the feagaiga is its ‘credit worthiness’. The female acts as “SOMEONE who will be able to ransom or redeem the aiga, the village, the District, or even the whole country should they ever be in a position of dire need.”\textsuperscript{203} The female’s role in this covenant is her promise to remain chaste and pure, so that the pride of her family may remain intact, and, when the times comes, the sister accepts her fate, as a match is made for her, so that she can bring status and political leverage to her family. From the narratives of Nafanua we see the avenging and loyal nature of Samoan women; we also see foresight and fairness in the distribution of the highest-ranking titles of Samoa that will be covered in the history of Salamasina.

\textit{Queen Salamasina of Samoa: E gase toa, ae ola Pule}\textsuperscript{204} ‘Warriors die and battles are forgotten but a just leader is remembered’

In Western terms, Salamasina is usually considered more a part of history than mythology. However, for Samoans stories about Salamasina occur throughout the nation’s past. Some believe that she was the daughter of Nafanua; others say Salamasina was

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Tagaloa, Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le (n.d.). 'The Social Status and the Economic Roles of the Females in Traditional and Modern Samoan Society'. Samoa: National University of Samoa (Iunivesite-o-Samoa).
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Nafanua’s granddaughter. I personally believe the account of Brother Fred Henry in *The History of Samoa* who gives a genealogy that puts at least 10 generations between the two. Nafanua’s presence in Salamasina’s narratives can be explained by her superhuman abilities as a god. This chapter will focus on the role of Salamasina as *le tupu o Samoa* ‘the first monarch of Samoa’. It is Nafanua’s legacy that afforded Salamasina her influential role in both Samoan society and Samoan history. This chapter will look at the genealogy, adoption, love, reign, cunning and legacy of Salamasina as a method of understanding the roles and expectation placed upon women within Samoan society. Through the life of Salamasina we see female instances of leadership and the traditional qualities that show the true nature of womanhood in Samoan understanding. The following narratives on Salamsina are both oral accounts from my grandmother backed up by the writings of Lambie and Henry. The history of Salamasina is a summary of both what I have read and what I have been told. They are both simplified and shortened so that the crux of these narratives can be seen within context; therefore, only key episodes within her life are retold within this section.

**Salamasina’s Genealogy**

Salamasina’s family connections were numerous and widely spread. Salamasina was connected to the ruling families of Samoa, Fiji and Tonga. These connections made

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205 The genealogies provided by both Lambie and Kraemer refute this argument.
her the highest ranking person in Samoa and through this she had the support of all the ruling families of Samoa as it was seen as an honour to have a person (of their blood) of such high status, who would one day become queen.\textsuperscript{208}

\ldots Salamasina had many family connections. She descended from Tuiaana, Tuisamo and Tuimanu’a; through adoption she was connected with Tuiatua and Tonumaipe’a; through her mother she was related with the Salemuliana, Tuitonga and tuifiti\ldots \textsuperscript{209}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[209] Ibid. p40
\end{footnotes}
Her Birth – Salamasina’s Adoption

Salamasina was born in Leulumoega to her father, Tamalelagi, and her mother, Vaetoe, a Tongan princess. From all accounts she was a beautiful child and her father, a high chief, sent word to his family spread across Samoa. The news was received by his cousin Levalasi whose taupou title was So’oa’emalelagi (to be called So’oae from here on) who was at the time mourning the loss of her husband and was also very well-known and highly ranked in Samoa. Upon arriving in Leulumoega, So’oae took the child up in her
arms and exclaimed for all to hear, “mavave, ua lalelei si teine e pei o le sala masina. Oh, the little girl is as beautiful as yonder moon.”

So’oae gave Salamasina the following blessing:

You look as lustrous and wise as Sina-a-lagi-lagi, the daughter of Tagaloa. May you be the ‘perpetual full moon’, Salamasina, and a guiding light to your people…

After hearing So’oae’s praise of his daughter Tamalelagi then said, “Salamasina will forever be the name of my daughter”. Salamasina simply means the ‘light or radiance of the moon’. The morning after So’oae’s arrival in Leulumoega a number of high chiefs came to pay their respects to So’oae. As the formalities concluded, So’oae let it be known to all present that she would be adopting Salamasina and that her future would be secure in her hands. Tamalelagi then spoke saying that this met with his approval and that, as So’oae was his “sister (cousin) the child should be hers as well as his”. So’oae declared to all present: “look well after the child. It shall never remain unguarded. A circle of women shall surround it at all times and the tuiaana’s kava chewers shall be its special guard”.

A long time before the birth of Salamasina, Nafanua had acquired the four pāpā titles (Samoan kingship titles) through strategic warfare and would not release the titles

213 Ibid. p67
back to the families who had once wielded them.\textsuperscript{215} So’oae had tried numerous times to persuade Nafanua to return the titles to their rightful owners, or at least return Tamalelagi’s rightful title of Tuiaana.\textsuperscript{216} However, Nafanua time and time again refused to return the title to Tamalelagi on the premise that he still had too many enemies and that the return of the title would just cause more fighting and hardship.\textsuperscript{217} Upon the birth of Salamasina, everyone felt that a new era had begun and the Samoan people held high hopes that their present troubles would soon be a thing of the past.\textsuperscript{218}

As time went by, Salamasina grew to be a happy and healthy child, however, her father had fallen ill and on his deathbed, said:

\begin{quote}
I regret that I have no title to bestow upon my successor. Nafanua has them in her keeping still. Whenever she relents, let all the titles be conferred upon Sooaemalelagi in order to avoid strife and war. Salamasina will be her daughter and my eldest son her right hand and the protector of both mother and child.\textsuperscript{219}
\end{quote}

Tamalelagi then passed away.

As time passed, So’oae was approached by Nafanua’s priest Tupai. He said to So’oae that he had been sent by Nafanua to offer her the four \textit{papa} titles. So’oae declined the offer, but asked that Tupai request the conferring of the four titles upon her daughter

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{215} Suluga (2008) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa. \\
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid. \\
\end{flushright}
Months passed by again with no word from Tupai, and So’oae assumed Nafanua had rejected the idea. One day, Tupai arrived and made the announcement that they were to confer the titles upon So’oae, however, her mind had not changed. Holding the four titles would make her tapu, and So’oae would not be allowed to care for Salamasina, and she worried about leaving her to the care of a stranger. Tupai then said to So’oae, “do you consent that the titles be given to Salamasina? She would, of course, be sacred, but as you also have been made sacred by Nafanua, the child could still remain in your care.” So’oae replied in the affirmative, and Salamasina was conferred the four pāpā titles of Samoa, making her the Tupu o Samoa ‘Queen of Samoa’. She was the first person to hold all four titles and became the first ruler of Samoa. The years passed by peacefully and Salamasina’s government went from strength to strength.

Idols and human sacrifices were abolished… wars between districts were a thing of the past...

Much of Salamasina’s success can be attributed to So’oae. From a very young age, So’oae had taught Salamasina the importance of justice, virtue, charity and duty. As Salamasina grew into a young woman, all accounts show she was a just and fair ruler. Salamasina believed that in order to foster peace there must be open discourse throughout the kingdom, this belief saw Salamasina travelling across the expanse of Samoa, visiting all

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220 Ibid.
221 Ibid. p70
222 Ibid.
224 Ibid.
the ruling families of Samoa, settling quarrels, reaffirming her position within the islands.

Salmasina’s First Love

Salmasina fell in love with one of the young men of her court, Alapepe, who was also of chiefly birth, however, he was not noble enough to make a good marriage for Salamasina. While Salamasina realized that it was wrong and that nothing could ever happen between them, she flirted with Alapepe. Shortly after this had happened, the Samoan islands began to suffer through droughts and earthquakes.

After the death of Tamalelagi, Vaetoe, Salamasina’s mother returned to Tonga and remarried, remaining in Tonga. Salamasina missed her mother dearly, knowing that she could not travel to visit her as she was needed and required to remain in Samoa. So’oae would comfort the young queen who would quickly cheer up. The islands of Samoa were suffering and Salamasina, who had flirted with Alapepe, believed that she had angered the gods and the disasters were her doing. Now a young woman, Salamasina longed to see her mother, and as she was walking through the bush, after visiting families on a nearby island, she caught a pigeon, and she sang to it this song:

Fly, birdie, fly to Tonga,


Kramer talks of the feelings Salamasina and Alapepe shared secretly with each other over a period of years. This narrative has been condensed so as to fit into this thesis.

Tell my mother to come;  
Ask her to visit her child,  
The prisoner pines with longing.  
Fly, birdie, fly to Tonga,  
Tell my mother to come  
And soothe the pain of her child.  
Fly, birdie, fly away;  
Bring blessings from my mother,  
Bring rain to our land.  

On her return to Leulumoega, Salamasina spotted two Tongan war crafts and news came by messenger that her mother had arrived to visit her. Vaetoe remained in Samoa until the next full moon and on parting with Salamasina on the shore said:

You are the queen; you are loved by the whole country. The different clans of Samoa have, at last, united under your scepter. See to it that they have one voice and one heart… Let your people remain united lest the Tongans come and subjugate you again… Therefore, do all you can to keep your people united.  

As the years passed, Salamasina became aware of the fact that the government and So’oae wanted her to marry Tapumanaia, a young man she had met in Savaii and who she, on first impression, had greatly disliked. Being depressed with the decision she had to make about consenting to an arranged marriage, Salamasina decided to go on a picnic with three of the young men of her court as her protectors.  

As lunch was being prepared, it

\[ \text{228} \text{ Ibid. p58} \]

\[ \text{229} \text{ Ibid. p63} \]

\[ \text{230} \text{ Kraemer and Lambie have differing accounts of the events that led up to the point where Salamasina and Alapepe had sexual relations; however, the consequences do not differ in either narrative. For the narrative not used in this chapter read: Kraemer, Augustin and Herman, Brother (1958), \textit{Salamasina: scenes from ancient Samoan culture and history/ translated into English [by] Bro. Herman, 1949.; Pago Pago, American Samoa: Association of the Marist Brothers' Old Boys.} \]
was fate that Salamasina and Alapepe were left alone. After talking for some time about the arranged marriage and how sad this made Salamasina, Alapepe forgot about Salamasina’s sacredness, and the two slept together. After realising the severity of what they had done, Salamasina told Alapepe that for his safety, he must flee, lest anyone find out what they had done. On their return to the village, Salamasina consented to the arranged marriage saying: “very well… dispatch the messengers. Do what you think is right. I shall live and die for my dear Samoa”.

Salamasina knew that her body had changed, and shortly after her marriage to Tapumanaia, Salamasina found she was pregnant with Alapepe’s child. During the pains of childbirth, and under the fear that because of her one indiscretion the child would suffer, Salamasina confessed her sins to her husband, who, because of his own indiscretions, could not judge his wife for a momentary lapse. Salamasina gave birth to a baby girl, and to cover up the truth, Tapumanaia claimed the child as his own naming her Fofoaivaoese meaning “conceived in the dark bush”. A short time later, Salamasina gave birth to a son, and as there was no confusion as to who the father was, he was named Tapumanaia, and it was thought, or assumed, that he would be the successor to the four titles but

235 Ibid. p75
Salamasina had other plans, secretly working towards installing her daughter as the next monarch.\textsuperscript{236}

**Salamasina’s Reign**

Salamasina made the decision to take an active role in the administration of her kingdom and to this end, made regular journeys paying visits to varying parts of her island nation in order to secure and increase her “already good relations with the chiefs and orators who would act as a counter balance in any difficulty that might arise between her and the Faleiva (the council of chiefs who had ruled the nation on her behalf until she came of age) at Leulumoega.”\textsuperscript{237} Due to Salamasina’s strength and personality and also her skill at handling and speaking to people, it was not long before Salamasina won over all the high-ranking chiefs and orators of Samoa.\textsuperscript{238} This confidence gave her the strength to stand up to the Faleiva, who continuously tried to manipulate Salamasina into decreeing policies that were not in the interest of the nation as a whole.\textsuperscript{239}

**Tongan Trickery and Royal Cunning**

One day as Salamasina’s travelling party was resting, two Tongan messengers approached Salamasina, prostrated themselves at her feet and upon invitation, were

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid. p76
\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
welcomed by Salamasina. After chatting, the messengers said to Salamasina that Ulualo, their chief, would like an audience with Salamasina; as he was rather sickly, he could not make the journey to her. Salamasina agreed to make the journey to see Ulualo, as the messengers said that he had news for her from Tonga. Upon talking to villagers, Salamasina uncovered the fact that there were six Tongan war ships moored just off the coast of Lona (Ulualo’s village) which were being hosted by Ulualo himself. Whilst no one truly knew the reason for the presence of the war ships at Lona, Salamasina decided to brave the journey anyway. So’oae who had an understanding of the visitor’s motives talked with the queen and raised her suspicions. So’oae warned Salamasina that whilst they would journey to Lona they must be cautious. After more discussion with Salamasina, So’oae said to their messengers:

I fear trickery on their part, send secret messages to Lufilufi, Faleapuna and Falefa to come in their war canoes and lay in wait behind the west cape of the bay… Let another message be sent to my families in Lepā, Lotofaga and Salani. Five hundred well armed warriors will come over the mountains and approach Lona from the rear so secretly that no one will suspect their presence… This is the will of Salamasina.

The following day, as Salamasina’s travelling party reached Lona, Ulualo himself welcomed her and apologised for his inability to make the journey to Salamasina. After some small talk Salamasina asked about the news from Tonga which the messengers had mentioned. Ulualo then replied that the most recent arrival from Tonga had bought news that Salamasina’s mother was gravely ill and desirous of her presence, and that if

240 Ibid.
241 Tu'u'u, Misilugi (2001). _Rulers of Samoa Islands & their legends and decrees_. Wellington: Tuga'ula.
243 Ibid. p78
Salamasina desired to travel to Tonga, their war ships would escort her.\textsuperscript{244} Salamasina was extremely upset by this, and lashed out at Ulualo for not telling her sooner. Whilst this conversation was being carried out, So’oae, who had until then been standing in the background, realised that the \textit{fale} they were sitting in had been surrounded by Tongan warriors. After more strongly worded admonitions from Salamasina, Ulualo signalled to the warriors and more strangers arrived and continued to surround the queen and her party within the \textit{fale}. Salamasina, alarmed at the sight and sudden massing of so many strangers, whispered to So’oae and then stepped forward in front of all gathered there and in a strong clear voice, turned to Ulualo and said:

\begin{quote}
What is the meaning of this large gathering of strangers in my kingdom? Is it to bring me news from my mother that so many men are needed? I notice that some are even armed with sticks and clubs. This is forbidden in Samoa. I command that you take to your boats and leave immediately. I myself will dispatch a canoe to Tonga to get news from my mother. The governments of Aana and Atua, Sagana and Safata order your departure. I, the four-titled queen command it.\textsuperscript{245}
\end{quote}

So’oae, who was watching these warriors intently, sent a messenger to blow the conch shell, as this was the pre-determined signal for the Samoan warriors to show themselves and defend their queen.\textsuperscript{246} Before long, the conch sounded out above the village and hundreds of Samoan warriors appeared, as if out of nowhere. Ulualo and his Tongan warriors knew that their attempt had failed and Salamasina, realising just how narrow her

\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.
escape had been was furious at this disrespect and treachery. This was how Salamasina and So’oae defeated the attempted abduction.

Her Last Years

Although Salamasina’s reign lasted more than forty years, history and tradition does not tell any tales of war and dissatisfaction within the Samoan polity. Salamasina made it her life’s work, using her ever increasing influence and power, to revolutionize the role of women within the kingdom by giving “permanency to the married state”, having suffered a loveless marriage herself. She also worked tirelessly to increase the importance and enhance the already significant position of women by supporting the institutions of the aualuma. Taking into account the endless unrest between the three royal families of Samoa, Salamasina’s influence can be seen, demonstrating the immensity of her diplomacy and authority throughout the islands of Samoa. Peace was restored and maintained in Samoa for as long as Salamasina was in power.

From the account of Salamasina we see the determination, defiance and diligence of women. However, the most important and indeed honourable facet of Salamasina’s life that must be pointed out is that of sacrifice. Like Nafanua’s narratives, it is the ideal of a woman’s duty, not only to her family and village, but to her district and in turn, nation.

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247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
To elevate the social standing of the women, Salamasina taught them self-respect, good manners, how to treat their husbands and bring up their children. She encouraged them to manufacture native cloth (siapo) and to weave the fine mats which play such an important part in native life. From her own experience she knew how the whole life of a woman is often ruined by forcing her to marry, for political reasons, a man she does not love and she opposed such marriages whenever they came to her knowledge.  

Salamasina illustrates the role of women not only as leaders but more importantly as daughters and wives. Through her we see how not only her family but her nation’s honour, status and respect are hinged on her purity and dignity. Salamasina consented to marrying Tapumanaia to cover her indiscretion and restore her honour, which in turn restored and maintained the honour of her family. In her response to So’oae, that she was willing to die for her beloved Samoa, we see the sacrifice and sadness that sometimes accompanies duty and obligation to one’s family and, in this instance, nation.

The Perception of Samoan women from the history of Salamasina

From the history surrounding Salamasina, le tupu o Samoa, we see many instances of the strength and importance of the Samoan woman. Many references are made to the equality of women’s status within traditional Samoan society. Through Salamasina’s leadership and diplomacy, there is strong evidence of the ability of women to hold positions of immense power, where the women of Samoa are leaders, not just followers. Also from Salamasina’s example we see the immense duty that Samoan women feel towards their families, villages and districts. This duty is illustrated by Salamasina’s

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decision to go through with the arranged marriage. Women within pre-Christian Samoan society sacrificed themselves, their dreams and their desires for the good of their families. Many people argue against the idea of arranged marriages, however, many people forget that females consent to these marriages, and at the centre of all this controversy is the idea that the family will ensure the woman’s safety. As with Salamasina, Samoan women are diplomats, strategists and peacemakers. As mentioned earlier, women are referred to as the pae or auli. They are the ones to sort out family conflict; they are also the ones to ensure peace and happiness within the home and the village. This is demonstrated throughout Salamasina’s reign, during which there were no accounts of war or civil unrest. When any conflicts arose, Salamasina was quick to act so that it did not get blown out of proportion.

The Samoan women of old were of course the mothers and daughters they were expected to be, however, through Salamasina’s story we see exactly what these expectations once were. Salamasina did everything, including entering a love-less marriage in order to protect her unborn child. As a mother, Salamasina ensured the safety, happiness and education of all her children. As a wife, Salamasina carried out her wifely duties and showed an honesty, integrity and acceptance in her dealings with her husband surrounding the birth of her daughter. As a daughter, Salamasina continued the legacy of both her father and adopted mother So’oae. She upheld the honour of her family and maintained the good name and relations that had been formed before her rise to power. Salamasina showed that best type of leadership principles that are still valued to this day, are courtesy, respect, honour, fairness, diplomacy, open conversation and diligence.

One of the most important aspects to come out of Salamasina’s reign, which has now become an integral part of the Samoan psyche and understanding is the saying, *E gase*
*toa, ae ola pule* ‘Warriors die and battles are forgotten, but a just leader is remembered’.

This is a proverb that speaks to the heart of all things Samoan, and refers in particular to the ideal of *tautua*.\textsuperscript{253} The reign of Salamasina brought with it four decades of peace and prosperity. She set an unprecedented example for all rulers to follow, that peace was possible without the use of force and oppression.

Salamasina teaches us about tautua. The fact that the only way we can make a difference, and be looked up to and respected, not only in our family, but in our nation and culture, is to serve the people we wish to lead. Only through service can we learn to lead. That is what *e gase toa ae ola pule* means to me.\textsuperscript{254}

As a daughter, Salamasina’s duty was to maintain the relationships that were held dear by her parents; she was also expected to carry on the legacy left by her father. His rights to the throne fell upon Salamasina, and it was her role to maintain the *mana* of the *tafa ifa* ‘four kingship titles of Samoa’. Maintaining and adhering to the legacy left by her father, Salamasina illustrates the inherent ability of Samoan women to be chiefs or *matai*. Salamasina’s leadership shows both responsibility and fairness in both her actions and decisions. Within Salamasina’s leadership we also see the Samoan ideal of leadership which is based on the principle of *tautua*, or service. This service entails the sacrifice of the individual’s time, life, and dreams for the good of the people as a whole.

In looking at Salamasina’s life, it is evident not only through her character but also through that of her mother that to be a good leader within the Samoan context, one does not


\textsuperscript{254} Participant L (2010) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.
need to be male. Samoans are a peaceful people and to the Samoan understanding, leadership is not only about being adept at battle. The Samoan ideal of leadership is based on two fundamental principles: diligence and service.

A good leader is not necessarily a man, a good leader is not necessarily a woman, we do not have a preference of gender, we look at a person’s tautua, or willingness to serve others and at their work ethic. These factors make a good leader because it means that the communal well-being of the aiga Potopoto (whole family) will be upheld.255

From the narratives of Nafanua and Salamasina, we are given an insight into the Samoan understanding and the involvement of women in both Samoan mythology and history. The role of the sister as the feagaiga is illustrated through the narratives and life of Nafanua, her encounter with her brother and her relationship with her father. The role of the woman as both wife and daughter are explained through the sacrifice and leadership of Salamasina, the first to hold the four Samoan kingship titles, the first tafa’i fa. The woman’s role as the pae, or auli appears not only in these Samoan narratives but is also supported by the views of interview participants. However, whilst women carry out all these roles, the most important and sacred of these is the woman’s role as the feagaiga. The role of the feagaiga is sacred and pertains to the religious beliefs and practices of the Samoan people.

The Role of the Samoan Woman as Wife and Daughter

When looking at the role of a Samoan woman as that of wife, there are many narratives that one might take into account. There is a Samoan story of Puapae, the daughter of the Samoan song god and a young man named Siati that is recounted in the writings of George Turner, and speaks to the heart of a woman’s role as a Samoan wife. Throughout this story, however, be reminded that a woman’s status and rank, once married, is inextricably interwoven into and with the role and status of her spouse. This narration talks of a woman’s love and what duties follow with this love in mind. Siati was a young man renowned for his beautiful singing voice, and one day, a singing god came by and challenged Siati to a singing competition, promising that if Siati won, he would be given the god’s beautiful daughter as his wife.\(^{256}\) They competed and Siati won the challenge, and he rode off on a shark to where the daughters were said to be. Upon reaching the pool where the two daughters bathed, Siati sat waiting, as the two girls had left. One of the daughters, Puapae, had forgotten her comb and had returned to the pool to retrieve it.\(^{257}\) Upon returning, Puapae saw Siati and said, “Siati, however have you come here?” Siati replied, “I have come to seek the song-god and get his daughter to wife.”\(^{258}\) Upon hearing this, Puapae consented to marry Siati, and off they went to marry.

However, Puapae’s father, the song-god, was not happy and sent his other daughter with a message for Siati, saying that he wanted Siati to build him a house, and that it should

\(^{257}\) Ibid.
\(^{258}\) Ibid. p102
be completed that same day, or Siati would be faced with death.\textsuperscript{259} Upon receiving the message, Siati wept, knowing that the task was nigh impossible, however, his wife Puapae came to him, comforting him and saying to leave it to her, that she would complete the house and so she did.\textsuperscript{260} Seeing the completed house, the song-god issued another challenge for Siati, ordering that he fight with a dog, which Siati did, and came out victorious.\textsuperscript{261}

Angered by Siati’s victory, the god came to Siati saying that he had lost his ring, and that Siati must find it, and if he did not, he would surely suffer death at the god’s hands.\textsuperscript{262} Siati again wept, and yet again, his wife came to him, and told him to leave it to her. However, she would need his help this time, and instructed him to cut her body in two and toss her into the ocean; she then told him to stand still on the beach, awaiting her return.\textsuperscript{263} Siati did as he was told, and cut his wife in two. As he tossed her into the sea, she was transformed into a fish and off she swam to find her father’s missing ring.\textsuperscript{264} Siati stood on the beach, waiting for the return of his wife. After a while, Siati sat down, and after further waiting lay down and fell asleep. Upon the return of his wife, Siati was asleep on the beach.\textsuperscript{265} Puapae woke Siati by splashing water on his face and scolded him for not staying awake to await her return; Puapae then gave Siati the ring telling him to return it to her father in the morning.\textsuperscript{266}

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{260} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{263} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid.
Siati and Puapae travelled to return the ring to the song-god. The god and his second daughter Puauli were travelling towards them with the intention of killing Siati, whether he had found the ring or not. Seeing her father nearing them, and knowing his intentions, Puapae and Siati first threw down a comb that transformed into a thorn bush to block their advance, however, the two avenging beings struggled through and continued towards the married couple.  

Next Puapae and Siati threw down a bottle of earth that was transformed into a mountain. Seeing that this was unsuccessful in slowing her family’s approach, they then threw down a bottle of water which expanded and turned into an ocean drowning both Puauli and her father, the song-god.

Observing the demise of her family, Puapae then said to Siati, “My father and sister are dead, all on account of my love for you; you may go now and visit your family and friends while I remain here, but see that you do not behave unseemly.” Siati then went and visited his friends and family, and after a time passed, Siati forgot all about his wife Puapae, and decided to marry again. On the day of the impending nuptials, Puapae came and stood on the other side of the ceremony. Upon being asked which one was his wife, he answered that the woman he was about to marry was his wife. Puapae, both saddened and angered by his answer broke her silence saying, “Ah Siati, you have forgotten all I did for you.” As she turned and left the ceremonial grounds, Siati remembered exactly what Puapae had done for him. Knowing that he had made a mistake, Siati ran after his wife

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267 Ibid.
268 Ibid.
269 Ibid. p104
270 Ibid.
271 Ibid. p104
crying, however, as her figure melted into the distance, Siati fell to the ground and died, just as Puapae’s father had threatened him on so many occasions.272

From this narrative, the role of wife is one that is integral to the success of males. In essence, males within traditional Samoan society cannot succeed without the input, aid and participation of women in whatever they endeavour to achieve. There is a difficult transition for women from acting as daughter and sister to fulfilling the role of wife. Women go from working and residing within the protection of both her father and brothers to being tied to the fate of her husband. From the above narrative, even though the husband is undeserving, the wife remains true throughout so much hardship. Until Siati rejects his wife’s love; she is unwilling to break her marriage vows. Women, as wives, not only aid and place their fate into their husband’s hands, but are indeed the glue that holds the family together, as illustrated by Participant I:

...their role as mother, they are the bearers of life and the givers of life. The fundamental role as a mother is to raise their children to be good Samoan children, so that they know their culture and language, to pass on culture, genealogy, to socialise them so that they understand their roles, passing on the knowledge in terms of behaviour and contributing to the extended family. So, they are the centre or the pulse of the extended family in terms of making sure that everyone knows what is expected of them and what their rights and obligations are. However, a pivotal role that women play is that of wife, supporting their husbands in whatever capacity they are operating, either in the cultural sense, or within cultural politics.273

From the story of Siati and Puapae we see three instances of gender roles. Puapae’s father, the song god, issued three challenges for Siati to overcome. The first of these

272 Ibid.
challenges was to build a house in a day. Siati wept. Puapae comforted him and completed the task. From the first challenge issued by the song god, we are given a glimpse of how women were expected to act and the roles they were expected to fulfil. Puapae showed both determination and diligence in completing the house that was demanded of Siati. Throughout the story there is also the idea that women are to aid their husbands, or family, and in many cases complete the task on their own, however, the credit is taken by the men. Women are the ‘behind-the-scenes’ players.

The second challenge issued was that Siati fight a dog. Here Siati completes the task without much mention of any internal conflict. Within the second challenge issued to Siati, the fact that Puapae is not mentioned speaks volumes about the role of women in traditional Samoa. This shows us that it was almost unthinkable for women to be involved in instances of violence and physicality. This points to the idea that women are the dignity of their family, as it is undignified in Samoan society to take up arms against each other. Samoans pride themselves on their verbal skills and there is much pride to be gained from those individuals who can ‘cut people’ with their tongues. Because males are more physical, it stands to reason that women are less physical and indeed use their words and perhaps, by implication, their minds.

The third and final challenge that was issued was the retrieval of the gods’ ring. Siati again wept and again Puapae said that she could find the ring, however, she would need his help. After finding the ring, Siati and Puapae went together to return it and were attacked on the way by Puapae’s father and sister. Upon being attacked, Puapae has a hand in the death of both her father and sister. The third challenge this narrative talks about is the most interesting of the three. This example of the role of both males and females in Samoan
society illustrates the complementarity of roles and the importance of females to all undertakings within Samoan life. In the completion of this challenge we see that Puapae does all the hard work. In searching for the ring, however, she needed Siati’s help. Puapae asked Siati to cut her in two and told him to stand still in the shallow water and wait for her. This shows that women need males not only for their physical prowess but also for their solidarity and support for whatever women are attempting to undertake.

The importance of females within traditional Samoan society can also be gauged from the role that Puapae plays in finding the ring. Puapae carries out the bulk of the task; splitting herself in two and searching for the ring under the water. This idea of ‘splitting in two’ points towards a capability on the woman’s part to multi-task. This idea of multi-tasking is in reference to a Samoan woman’s ability and refers to the idea of being pulled towards two very different roles. This illustrates the Samoan woman’s ability to carry the responsibilities of being wife and mother and also to uphold her obligations as a sister and daughter; thus pulling her in two very different directions. Within this narrative, Puapae, as an example of the Samoan woman, bridges the division between the roles of sister and daughter versus wife and mother perfectly. Upon finding the ring, Puapae returns to find that Siati had fallen asleep. Angry, Puapae scolded Siati, and admonished him for leaving her unprotected and alone. This illustrates another important facet of the role of women. Women in traditional Samoan society were never subjected to the will of men, or oppressed by male ego, women were very much outspoken and heard within society. Their role was to keep men on the ‘straight and narrow’. Puapae’s anger also points out an important aspect of this idea of complementarity. While the woman does the hard work (in this case searching for the ring) the male’s role is to ensure her safety while she is absorbed with her
task. If logic applies here, this indeed would mean that the male becomes the dignified voice of reason and the woman becomes the physical actor. In this change of roles, we see why Puapae is so angry that Siati has fallen asleep; in essence, with her husband falling asleep Puapae is not whole.

Upon finding the ring, Puapae and Siati go to return the ring together but on the way, they are attacked by her father and sister. This part of the narrative talks of the hardship Puapae faced when having to decide between her husband and her father and sister. However, on being attacked, Puapae aided her husband in overcoming each of the three attacks. Indeed, Puapae helped Siati murder her family because of both her love and obligation to her husband. After defeating her family, Siati, with Puapae’s permission, heads off to visit his friends and family. As time passes, Siati forgets the immense sacrifice Puapae made for him and decides to marry again. Puapae turns up on his wedding day and admonishes him for forgetting about everything she had done for him, indeed adding insult to injury for Puapae. As she turns and walks away, Siati remembers the sacrifices she made and cries out for her to return, however, it is too late, and Siati dies. Puapae, throughout the time she was mourning the death of her family, had remained loyal to her husband, however, her love had been spurned and she was released from all or any obligation to her husband. While this story appears to focus more on Siati rather than Puapae I believe it is more a case of the source being European, one perhaps with inbuilt biases. I say this because, bar one action, the entire story is made up of the actions, feelings and thoughts of Puapae. The story does not function to talk of Siati’s life, nor that of her father Siati merely comes into the story in order to illustrate to Samoans, both male and female, 1) the role of the Samoan woman as wife, and 2) what can come about if a husband spurns and/or takes
for granted the sacrifices his wife makes for him. This story illustrates the delicate balance of wedded life as understood by Samoans.

A Samoan girl is taught that once she is married her allegiance is to her husband. Her honour, status and role in her community are dependent on her husband, and until such a time that this bond has been broken, she remains obligated to him.  

Olive brought up another point entirely; saying that the woman’s role in traditional Samoan society was no different from the males. The only issue being that their male and female roles are mainly exercised within their own gender. However, whilst pointing out these ideals, Olive also emphasised within her answer that a Samoan woman’s primary role within society is that of a daughter.

The woman’s role as daughter can be illustrated through another narrative chronicled in the writings of Turner. There once was an old chief, in Savai’i, who, after his evening meal, ordered that there be a crab reserved for his breakfast the next morning. However, during the night, the young men ate the crab that was reserved for the old chief. Upon waking and finding out that the crab he had asked to be put aside for his breakfast had been eaten, the chief flew into a rage, raving about the unkindness and disrespect of his family. The chief, talking to his daughter, told her that he was leaving and was going to commit suicide and then come back as a raging storm to smite those who had wronged him.

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277 Ibid.
The old chief walked off into the bush, followed by his daughter. Upon reaching a large ravine, the chief turned to his daughter saying that he would “jump over, and cause a storm to arise and destroy the place”. Following this statement, the chief dived into the ravine. His daughter, realising there was no use in returning home knowing that a storm was on its way to flatten her family and home, lay down in front of the ravine. Her body was transformed into a mountain blocking the storm of her father’s rage and saving the family and village from the wrath of her father.

This story illustrates exactly the point that Olive was trying to make. In her (Olive’s) opinion, the role of the daughter is one of the most important roles a woman can have. It is her responsibility to smooth out and soften the rage and wrath that can be brought down by her father’s anger. From my own understanding and observation, it is the daughter that the father goes to when there are no words to express anger. It is the daughter that must speak to the offending parties, and sort out the situation. It is also the daughter who ultimately holds the happiness and serenity of her father’s mind in her hands. This understanding was explained by Participant K:

As the older child and daughter in my family, for as long as I can remember, it has been my role to communicate between my father and brother when there are any issues at home. I find this is true with many of my friends too. We are the voice of reason, communication, calmness and sound judgement.

278 Ibid.
279 Ibid. p117
280 Ibid.
When looking at the role of women within both pre-Christian and modern Samoan society, one must keep in mind the differing but very powerful roles women hold in Samoan culture. That of both wife and sister. Through the narratives and history of Nafanua, we see the importance of women as sister and daughter. We see the how women are the covenant that binds together both familial and national bonds. Through Nafanua, we see the origins of the role of women as sisters, but we also see the dissolution of this role through the rapid acceptance of religion and missionary culture prophesied by Nafanua.

Through the history of Salamasina, we see the role of women as leaders, as wives and as mothers. In Salamasina’s example, and the presence of Sooae within this narrative, we see the pride, ingenuity and duty women wield within these roles. Through the roles of both these women, Samoan women can take pride in the knowledge that traditional Samoan roles were complementary, they were a reflection of traditional beliefs, life and necessity.

The following chapter will be an examination of traditional, pre-Christian, Samoan religion and the roles and status of women, including a discussion of women’s role in the Samoan creation mythology.
Chapter Four

Traditional Samoan Religion and the Samoan woman’s role

Religion is an integral part of the Samoan custom. Almost every Samoan belongs to one of the several Christian churches that have been established in the islands since the early 1800’s.  

The following chapter will begin with a brief discussion of various religious concepts and will outline pre-Missionary beliefs and gods of the Samoans including traditional Samoan creation mythology. The chapter will then look at the content of traditional Samoan religion, with specific discussion being held on the art and practice of tattooing and a traditional form of Samoan worship as a means of illustrating the incorporation of pre-Christian customs into the new. For all intents and purposes, this will be a history of Christianity in Samoa and will be looking at the absorption and interconnectedness of religion and the Samoan culture and how women’s roles have been incorporated and their status defined. The issue this section intends to delve into is the absorption, effect and influence that religion has within Samoan culture and upon the everyday life of the average Samoan. The absorption of religion has resulted in a form and relationship that is unique; where the influence of both religion and culture upon a nation’s political structure and process can be seen, critiqued and sometimes supported but is nigh impossible to separate. While this research intends mainly to look at the absorption of religion into the institution of Samoan culture, its absorption into the Samoan political arena will also be touched upon, as it is only through this view of Samoan public life that the reader can gauge the true extent to which religion has influence and has been absorbed into the private and public life of Samoans.

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Participant K talks of the importance of religion to both Samoan individuals and families as Christianity is the foundation upon which all modern Samoan relationships, including the feagaiga now rest upon.\(^{283}\)

Our nation’s motto states that Samoa is founded on God. This is true of all Samoan people, our lives, our families and all the relationships we hold important are founded on God. When we understand this, we understand the use of the term ‘feagaiga’ for the Samoan minister. There is a covenant the minister upholds that is much the same as our traditional ideas of brother and sister roles.\(^{284}\)

**Traditional Samoan Religious Beliefs Prior to Christianity**

Here is ‘ava for you, O gods!

Look kindly towards this family;
let it prosper and increase;
and let us all be kept in health.

Let our plantations be productive;
let fruit grow; and may there be
abundance of food for us, your creatures.

Here is ‘ava for you, our war gods!
Let there be a strong and numerous people
for you in this land.

Here is ‘ava for you, O sailing gods!
Do not come on shore at this place;
but be pleased to depart along
the ocean to some other land.\(^{285}\)

Pre-missionary beliefs and gods in Samoa are very hard to research. As it has been over 150 years since the arrival of the first missionaries and the acceptance of Christianity, there are very few sources from which to glean information on these traditional gods and beliefs. When asked in the interviews about their knowledge and experience of the


\(^{284}\) Ibid.

traditional Samoan church, many did not even mention pre-Christian religion, but instead talked about the arrival of John Williams, or indeed the beliefs they now hold derived from their mainstream churches.

While there is little in-depth information or written work on traditional Samoan religion, the gods that were worshiped, the way worship was carried out and even the beliefs that were held in the pre-missionary era, there are tidbits of information that can be gleaned from the journals of John Williams and writings of George Turner, who arrived in Samoa, and observed these practices themselves. There are also excerpts of information that are passed down from generation to generation of Samoans and are mentioned in passing or as a side note. Nothing more is said on the subject apart from the fact that it is very hard to find solid information on traditional Samoan religion. In the following chapter, I propose to review the fragments of information found concerning traditional Samoan beliefs and women. This will serve as a point of comparison with the principles and status of women in Samoan Christianity.

Within traditional Samoan religion, women were fundamental to the carrying out of the religion, including the spread of its beliefs and teachings. There are three concepts believed and taught by the children of Tagaloalagi throughout the islands that relate to the issues I want to raise about the involvement and participation of women within traditional Samoan religion. The first of these is the sprinkling of coconut water or coconut cream: this sprinkling signified the cleansing of the body and the soul, and also represented anointing
for its kings and high chiefs. The second of these is stewardship; where a love of the environment (and resources) will produce more for the generations ahead. The final of these concepts was the use of astronomy as navigational guides, including skills and knowledge of weather, sea currents, and birds’ migration. There are also various methods of worship that have survived Christian conversion. These various means of worship, as will be discussed in this chapter, have been absorbed and, to an extent, integrated into the practice and belief system of modern Samoan Christian belief.

**Samoan Creation Mythology**

Whilst there are varying accounts, the creation mythology is important to understanding the Samoan psyche. This mythology relates to the beliefs that surround the creation of the pre-Christian Samoan world. The following flow diagram illustrates the origin of the Samoan people: Take note that the final deity in this chronology is a female being and is known as the ‘true heir’ of the gods. The Samoan creation narratives are another indicator as to the ease with which Christianity was accepted and the almost instant conversion of the Samoans to Christianity.

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287 Ibid.
288 Ibid.
289 Ibid. p10-11
According to Samoan creation narratives, before everything, there was nothing. Second came nanamu or fragrance, after the arrival of nanamu there came the creation of dust known as efuefu. After efuefu came the iloa or perceivable, followed closely by the obtainable or maua. Perceivable and obtainable were followed by the creation of the earth, high rocks and then small rocks in close succession. Mountains followed and gave birth to the piercing dust or fasiefu. Fasiefu gave life to three sons and one daughter, and this daughter, Sulitonu, became the creator of the Samoan/human race.²⁹⁰

Within the creation narrative of the Samoans, the creator of the human race, and in this case, the Samoans, was a woman who goes by the name Sulitonu or true heir. As the

²⁹⁰ Ibid.
understanding of creation is always through the idea of reproduction, there are always male and female figures within this process, however, with Sulitonu, we are not given the name of her significant other.

There is also a Samoan concept that has come about as a response to this female deity, and this concept is the idea of *suli*. Suli acknowledges the idea that all Samoans, no matter who they are and where they come from, have the rights to claim lineage from two different lines. These two hereditary lines are comprised of the line of their mother, and the line of their father. Samoans always have a home to turn to and a family to support them; they have the right to voice their opinions, concerns and politics within at least two forums. This concept of Samoan lineage has come from the presence of a woman within the creation mythology of Samoa, and this ideal is fundamental to understanding the family dynamic of the Samoans. While this is one explanation for Sulitonu there is another; this is the idea of *sulitautua*, which simply means rights claimed through service. *Sulitautua* is the idea that through hard work, an individual can excel not only as an individual but can also better their family’s standing in Samoan society. *Sulitautua* is the recognition or understanding of the Samoan ideal of leadership. Samoans believe that leadership is realising and being able to serve those around you, as it is only those who are good servants that can become good leaders.

To the Samoans, service is everything. Service to your family, service to your *matai*, service to your village, and today, once of our most important values, is service to your church. Only when you are seen as someone that

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292 Ibid.
has given due service, or ‘paid their dues’, will you been seen as a good leader and role model.\textsuperscript{293}

I remember someone once telling me that we [Samoans] are the godless peoples of the Pacific. It wasn’t until very recently that I realised what this meant. As far as I know, we did not sacrifice humans or animals, we did not build large elaborate temples nor did we have a powerful religious sect.\textsuperscript{294}

From the little information I myself have been given from my grandmother I can say that there existed gods for everything: if crops were bad, a particular god was prayed to, if a family was going through hard times, again, a particular god was praised.\textsuperscript{295} The amazing thing I found when discussing ‘pagan’ religion as it was told to me, was the sheer number of deities that existed within this realm of thought, or belief. There were gods for the individual, family gods, village gods, district gods and national gods.\textsuperscript{296} Not only were Samoans tied to the gods of their parents, they were left to live under strict laws. Traditional (pre-missionary) Samoan society was strictly controlled by superstition and pride.\textsuperscript{297} Suluga added that superstition, while carrying negative connotations, was not meant that way. When the term superstition was used, she meant the beliefs that pre-dated the arrival of the Christian God in Samoa and that to this day are still maintained, even whilst the majority of Samoan people are Christian.\textsuperscript{298} Such superstition led to people living in fear of the gods they worshiped, and pride ensured that many resources were

\textsuperscript{293} Participant L (2010) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.  
\textsuperscript{296} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{297} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{298} Ibid.
given to the gods, through their priests, and continued to uphold the status quo of the Samoan people and the gods they worshiped.\textsuperscript{299}

…various early visitors to Samoa did observe that the Samoans themselves seemed a pious people who took the proper worship of their gods and the careful observance of their many supernaturally-sanctioned taboos most seriously.\textsuperscript{300}

\textit{Traditional Samoan Religion and the role of women}

Sources are limited for the role of women in traditional Samoan religion, however, the fragments of information gleaned from interview participants provide us with some understanding. The following section will be looking at the traditional roles of women with pre-Christian religion. When talking about the role of women within traditional (pre-Christian) Samoan religion Peggy made the observation, that the woman’s role and status was that of sacredness, of closeness to the gods.\textsuperscript{301} Participant E talked about women having roles as the ‘priestess’ and ‘teacher’ in traditional Samoan society. As the teachers of the children of Tagaloalagi women can be seen as extremely powerful and influential within their society.\textsuperscript{302}

There is very little written on the traditional methods of worship in pre-Christian Samoa. However, I agree with Le Tagaloa who argues that much of Samoa’s traditional worship can be seen in the way we practise Christianity today.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{299} Ibid.
\end{flushright}

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The *fanaafi o faamalama* was observed twice a day; in the early morning, approximately five o’clock by the *palagi* watch and in the evening... this worship placed importance on the lighting of the fire until the flames shoot up and lit up the whole house; this was referred to as *fanaafi o faamalama*...\(^{303}\)

Growing up in Samoa, we would have evening prayers whenever we were at my grandmother’s house. If my father or uncles were running the *lotu* and were not wearing a shirt they would chase one of the younger children to bring a shirt or *lavalava* that they would use to cover their shoulders. We would start with the reading of the bible, then a hymn, which was then followed by a prayer. As the prayer began everyone would prostrate themselves face down and someone would always get up to turn off the lights. The structure of the prayer was always the same:

1. Firstly, we thank God for his protection over us throughout the day and for the many blessings he had given us.

2. Secondly, we ask for forgiveness for any transgressions that had occurred over the course of the day.

3. Following this request we then ask for protection during the night as we sleep and for the following day.

4. The prayer is then finished with a request: *le Atua e ia e ‘afu i matou i le lautele o lou alofa* ”that we be covered in the vast expanse of God’s love”.  

As soon as the prayer was completed, the family sang in unison the *fa’ai‘ulotu*, a song that wraps up the evening prayers, so that those who did not pray could show their agreement with what was prayed for. The lights were then turned back on and we would partake of our evening meal.

When looking at the practice of *Fana‘afi o Fa‘amalama* there are many similarities between the way my family carried out our evening prayers or *lotu afiafi* and the pre-Christian practice of *afiafi*. At the beginning of the *afiafi* whoever was conducting the *afiafi* raised their right hand and was given a covering for their upper body. The family then sat in darkness while the fire is started and as it grew the following prayers were said by the family priest or priestess. Again we see another instance where the role of Samoan women as priestesses is of utmost importance not only to the carrying out of pre-Christian religious practice, but also to the family as a unit.

O le Fanaafi of Faamalama mo lau Afio, le Atua
Ia apepelea i matou i lou agagalelei
O le Fanaafi o Faamalama mo lau Afio, le Atua
Ua se atua ma lau afio lo matou agamasesei
O le Fanaafi o Faamalama mo lau Afio, le Atua
Ia taiasea i nuu le aina atua folau, e latou te aumaia mai ma mala
O le Fanaafi o Faamalama mo lau Afio, le Atua
Ia a’afu i matou i le lautele o lou alofa...

This is a fire votive for you our God
May you wrap us, cloak us in your goodness and kindness

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This is a fire votive to you our God
Our erring, wrongful, defiant ways are blatant before you.
This is a fire votive to you our God
Direct those ‘gods’ of the seas – seafarers, to uninhabited lands for they bear sickness and curses.
This is a fire votive to you our God
Cover us, hide us in the broad mantle of your love.  

Women of traditional Samoan society were extremely intelligent and knowledgeable when it came to culture, lineage and everything that went along with the practice of Samoa’s pagan religion.\(^{307}\) If women were indeed the priestesses and teachers of Samoan religious beliefs, then it follows that women would have had full power and determination over the teaching of other elements of the said religion, such as navigation. Participant E also mentioned the idea that women were the traditional healers and doctors of Samoa. There was a very real possibility that women had the ability to control the Samoan people through fear. This fear is not so much fear through ‘scare tactics’ or retribution, but is a fear that can be understood through the principle of action and consequence. Traditional healers would be able to use the knowledge of cures and healing to coerce the people into behaving and believing what they wanted them to.\(^{308}\) These traditional practitioners would also have been instrumental in the offering of sacrifices and encouragement of superstitions.\(^{309}\) In traditional Samoan religion, women were spiritual healers, invoking the power of the gods and knowledge passed down through the

\(^{306}\) Ibid. p41-42
\(^{307}\) Ibid.
\(^{309}\) Ibid.
generations to heal individuals. Here we can see the control that women had over society, as they could tell people what they had to do to rid themselves of disease, or appease the anger of the gods. Fundamentally, women were the mouthpieces of the gods. Women also held oversight of the spiritual well being of individuals, and this role has carried through to contemporary religion in Samoan society. Peggy talks about the role of women as being sacred and being the conduit that facilitates the conversion of the Samoan people and their conversations with god. The role of Samoan women within the covenant and within society makes sense, as it is a reflection of their relationship with Tagaloalagi.

Another important aspect of the traditional Samoan religion concerned the use of coconut oil and coconut cream for anointing. As mentioned earlier, it is the woman that produces these oils for anointment, this leads to the deduction that if not participating directly in the coronation or conveyance of chiefly titles women were very much involved in the production process. So involved, that they were integral to the successful conclusion of these proceedings. In this line of argument, it also makes sense to say that this form of production was centred on Samoan women who passed it on from mother to daughter or granddaughter.

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310 Mageo, Jeanette Marie (1991), 'Ma'i Aitu: The Cultural Logic of Possession in Samoa', Ethos, 19 (3).
312 Tu'u'u, Misilugi (2001). Rulers of Samoa Islands & their legends and decrees. Wellington: Tuga'ula.
The final aspect of Samoa’s pre-Christian teachings that I would like to make special mention of is that of stewardship, where a love of the environment would produce and provide more for generations to come.\(^{314}\) Being the purveyors and practitioners of the Samoan ‘pagan’ faith, women were very much involved in discussions on the stewardship of the land. Women not only held clout in this area, but would have outlined laws to protect the environment that was so essential to the subsistence living of the Samoan people.

The information gleaned from interview participants on the traditional role of women is crucial for illustrating women’s role within traditional Samoan religion. When asked what the traditional role of women in Samoan society was, three of the participants answers intrigued me.

Suluga, when asked to expand on the role of women in traditional Samoan society answered that a Samoan woman attends and participates in women’s organizations. She looks after the cleaning up of the community. She must be a member of the health committee and must also attend and participate in the weaving committees set up by the villages.\(^{315}\)

Participant E answered that the traditional role of the woman in Samoan society and religion was that of healer, teacher, priestess, maker of economic wealth, keeper of the lore/history of a family, peacemaker, redeemer, sister and nurturer.\(^{316}\)

\(^{314}\) Tu'u'u, Misilugi (2001). *Rulers of Samoa Islands & their legends and decrees*. Wellington: Tuga'ula.


Lemau answered that women bring everyone together. They also do everything behind the scenes to make sure that whatever goes on in the village runs smoothly and is well received and attended.\textsuperscript{317}

From the above responses, the role of women in traditional Samoan religion becomes quite clear. From Suluga we see the dedication and commitment of women to any task they undertake, and so, one of their roles in traditional religion would be to remain committed to the laws and doctrines of traditional Samoan religion; to lead by example. This can be seen in all three responses, a woman’s biggest role in any aspect of Samoan society, and most especially that of traditional religion, is to be a participant in the practices and teachings of religion. Participant E talks of the woman being the teacher and maker of economic wealth. From these two societal roles, women aid in the transmission and transferral of doctrine and laws to both children and wider society. We can also take from this response the idea that women’s contribution to traditional religion gives religion the means and resources to function and maintain its status within society. Lemau’s response is the one that most intrigues me; women, within traditional religion, are the arms of religion. They effect change, they make things happen, they bring people together, and in essence their work ‘behind the scenes’ ensures that the structure of religion carries on and through the most troublesome of times. While the existence of traditional Samoan religion has never been in question, the essence and indeed the practice of Samoan religion, as well as the role of women in these practices is much harder to grasp and we, as avid learners, can

only suggest, estimate, disseminate and correlate what is evident in Samoan society today, with what we know of Samoa’s past to try and find some sense in this web of belief.

The belief that *aitu*, or spirits, had the power to cause illness gave rise to a set of beliefs about their role. These were translated into a set of practices which were thought to identify the probable cause and the appropriate response to illness. Samoans believed that supernatural agencies determined the human condition.318

When missionaries arrived in Samoa Christianity was readily adopted and Samoans quickly became models for missionizing within the Pacific. I believe this came about because so many aspects of Christianity found corresponding and parallel practices with the Samoan traditional beliefs. To both the missionaries and to the Samoans there was one omnipotent God. Missionaries and teachers of the Christian faith were given a similar cultural status to *tamaitai* and were called *fa’afeagaiga*, ‘like the *feagaiga*’, as they were seen to encompass the same responsibilities as *tamaitai* in upholding the covenant between man and God, God and Church and man and man.319

The *tamaitai* was the peacemaker, she was the healer, the teacher, the keeper of the knowledge of the family, and she was also the priestess who resided over the private worship is the *matai* of the family was not present.320

Once a strong minded individual, or indeed idea, enters a close-knit society and culture, there are three possible outcomes. The foreign ideal or even person could become


immersed within this closed society and themselves be influenced by this society. The second possible outcome would be the breakdown of the indigenous system of belief and social hierarchy. The third outcome is what, in my opinion, has happened within the Samoan nation. Western Christian beliefs were absorbed within Samoan society. Christianity heavily influenced the practice of Samoan belief systems; however, the foundations and basis of this system have been inherently cemented into the practice of western religion within the Samoan experience. Christianity has influenced Samoan belief and world-view, and vice-versa.

Samoans find expression in Christian religion – a manner very similar to that of ancient times. The Samoan matai, or family heads still acts as the family’s intermediary with god.321

The following chapter will look into the history of Christianity in Samoa; the arrival of missionaries and their wives and the resultant rapid conversion of the Samoans following a prophecy from Nafanua. This next section will also delve into the idea of the indigenization of Western Christianity, the legacy of missionary wives, the absorption and interconnectedness of Christianity and the Samoan culture and the role that women play in modern Samoan Christianity.

Chapter Five
Christianity and the Samoan woman’s role

A Brief History of Christianity in Samoa

The early 19th century brought with it a new religion reaching to the farthest corners of the earth. From the early 1830s missionaries began missionizing the Pacific region. The most prolific and well known of these missionaries was John Williams. Before the arrival of the missionaries, there had been other parties of Europeans who had visited what had become known as the Navigator Islands, however, many feared the islands due to the nature of the meetings between indigenous peoples and Europeans. Both sides suffered losses as they fought each other, more out of fear than anything else. The tales of the savagery of the native population, and the harshness of conditions in the islands had reached missionary ears. As they made their way across the Pacific, trepidation and fear increased until it peaked as they were nearing the Navigator Islands.

While approaching this island, the missionary’s heart was filled with fear and expectation… he believed the Samoans to be a cruel and barbarous people.

On their way to Samoa, the missionaries stopped over in Tongatabu (Tonga), and Williams met with a man named Faueā. Faueā was a Samoan chief, residing in Tonga, who had been converted by Wesleyan missionaries. Faueā was also closely related to Malietoa Vainu’upo, one of the highest chiefs of Samoa. Upon his request, the missionaries agreed to take Faueā back to Samoa in the hope of using Faueā as a connection upon which to

323 Ibid. p140
found the new religion, Christianity. 324 Prior to 1830, Samoa had experienced regular but limited contact between themselves and the rest of the Pacific, and even less contact with Europeans, who were afraid of the savagery of the islanders.325 The communication and contact that had been established was from the Tongans, who would travel to Samoa in order to “secure fine mats, to contract marriages and to be tattooed”.326 This communication was only strengthened by the history between these two peoples. At one point in history, the Tongans invaded and conquered the Samoan people, and vice versa. From then on travel continued between the two islands.327 There were also two settlements of Wallisians and Fijians in two districts of Savaii prior to the arrival of the Europeans, however, aside from these aforementioned peoples, prior to missionary arrival there was very little communication and/or contact between the Samoans and other Pacific peoples.328

Around the time Williams, his fellow missionaries and their wives set sail for Samoa, the nation was engaged in civil war between chiefly factions for control of the country and the strongest districts of Samoa.329 The war was being fought mainly over the kingship of Samoa.330

324 Ibid. p140
327 Ibid.
It was towards the end of this most cruel and disastrous war in the history of Samoa that the eminent missionary John Williams landed at Sapapalii.\(^\text{331}\)

Before reaching Faueā’s family base, the missionary ship stopped off shore at Safune. The chief of Safune, Tagaloa Funefeai, worried that these were European sailors coming to plunder their village and readied his warriors to attack the ship, however, people of brown skin (Faueā and the Tahitian missionaries) were spotted on deck. Thinking that maybe this ship had come from Fiji, Tagaloa Funefeai told his troops to hold off.

Canoes set off to the ship, and a woman named Vi Laufanua Puaseisei was sent on board to offer *niu* (drinking coconuts). When she discovered that the ship was a “praying” ship, she offered the very first Samoan prayer to their God at Le Avatele.\(^\text{332}\)

As the missionaries landed in Savaii, they were welcomed by Malietoa Vainu’upo’s brother, and Faueā convinced Malietoa’s brother that their family should all embrace Christianity as:

…they are all much better since they embraced Christianity. Wars have ceased among them [other convert nations]. Ships visited them without fear and anchored in their harbours and brought them an abundance of Property. And you can see he observed that their God is superior to ours. They are clothed from their heads down to their feet and we are naked.\(^\text{333}\)

Malietoa’s brother, on hearing this speech from Faueā, sent men in canoes to tell his brother, Malietoa Vainu’upo, of their arrival.\(^\text{334}\) Upon Malietoa’s arrival, Faueā went to his kinsman and explained who these people were, why they were there and what they needed

\(^{331}\) Ibid. p131
\(^{332}\) Taule'ale'a'ausumai, Feiloaiga (1997). 'Pastoral Care: A Samoan Perspective'. in Dr. Philip Culbertson (ed.). *Counselling Issues & South Pacific Communities*. Auckland. New Zealand: Sneddon & Cervin Publishing. p220
\(^{334}\) Ibid.
in order to start evangelising. Malietoa Vainu’upo readily accepted the visitors and many people believed it was due to the close family ties between Faueā and Malietoa. However, this warm welcome had more to do with what happened at the end of the war between Malietoa, the rightful king, and his rivals.

Nafanua’s Prophesy to Malietoa Vainu’upo

After defeating all his rivals and before the arrival of Faueā and the missionaries, Malietoa travelled to Nafanua’s home to collect the titles that had become rightfully his. However, upon arriving at Nafanua’s home and asking for his rightful titles Nafanua replied:

Talofa, ua e sau, a ua ave le ao o Malo. Ae ui lea, o le a tali i le lagi sou malo ete fai malo i ai.
Alas, you have come, but the ruling title is gone. Nevertheless you will receive a kingdom from heaven and you will be its ruler.336

Shortly after Williams and his missionaries arrived in Samoa, Malietoa accepted this religion, or ‘good news’, and took it to mean the kingdom from heaven that Nafanua had foretold. Upon his conversion Malietoa proclaimed that the gospel of the ‘white man’ must be accepted.337 Malietoa Vainu’upo said to himself:

E le taumate o le malo lea na fai mai ai Nafanua, ina o faapea o ia: “E tali i le lagi sou Malo.” O lea e tatau ona talia.

337 Ibid.
This is the kingdom from heaven that Nafanua was talking about and therefore it must be received. 338

Ta’u mai nei tala lelei- tala lelei nauā
Upu e folafola mai- tala lelei naua
Tala o le alofa, tala e olioli 339

‘Tell me of the good news – the exceedingly good news
The words being shared are exceedingly good
They are words of love, words we should glory in’. 340

Wherever Williams went he carried out the requirements of missionary evangelism and the quality of his work was always good, however, he very rarely stayed in one place for long and preferred to let his colleagues carry on developing the peoples he had in the first place missionized. 341

Religion and commerce were bravely and cautiously entering upon new and barbarous regions. 342

Williams was also an avid believer in trade as an accessory to the movement of Christianity. He was convinced that if the islanders were given jobs and specific tasks to carry out there would be less time and even less inclination to get into trouble. 343 This theory was greatly popularized and supported in Britain, which was also one reason why the British Government saw the benefits of missionary work and supported such

338 Ibid. p131
340 Personal translation of Hymn Lyrics
343 Ibid.
endeavours.\textsuperscript{344} “The preacher, it was believed with some truth, [was] opening up new markets for British trade”.\textsuperscript{345}

Within pre-Christian Samoan society, whilst religion was important, there was not as much pre-occupation with religious monuments, idols, powerful priesthoods and temples, as there were amongst the peoples of Eastern Polynesia.\textsuperscript{346} This was much to the advantage and pleasure of the missionaries as it meant that they did not have to wage physical battles against religious paraphernalia but more that of ideology.\textsuperscript{347} 

Without idols or sacred marae the Samoans, unlike the Tahitians or Raiateans, could also avoid the traumatic test of destroying en masse the paraphernalia of their old religion.\textsuperscript{348} 

Gilson talks of the missionary inclination to tolerate the pagan practices and ‘sins’ of the Samoans in order to “make nominal conversion as easy as possible”.\textsuperscript{349} While missionaries saw a large segment of Samoan culture as pagan and barbaric, Gilson has argued that Williams’ journals and writings revealed a reluctance within himself to partake in a “sweeping condemnation of their behavior”.\textsuperscript{350} When Williams was asked by Malietoa as to what Samoan practices ought to be forbidden and/or suppressed, Williams did not

\textsuperscript{344} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{345} Ibid. p66  
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid. p73  
\textsuperscript{349} Macpherson, Cluny and Macpherson, Laavasa (1990). Samoan Medical Belief and Practice. Auckland. New Zealand: Auckland University Press. p46  
\textsuperscript{350} Ibid. p46
raise a majority of the beliefs and pagan practices of the Samoans, mentioning only warfare and obscene traditional dances and songs.  

The missionary attitude was that, decent though some of them might be, dancing was a waste of time and tended to be conducive to sexual licence. 

Missionary Wives

The rise of industrialisation and exponential growth of urban centers in England gave rise to the idea of the woman being the agent of civilization and the moral conscience of the masses. With this new ideology, and an increased focus on women’s religiosity, women became the chief ambassadors and instigators of the moral revolution in Europe from the early 1800s. Many of these missionary wives, who left their families and homes in the West to travel across the seas with their missionary husbands, were brought up to believe that the power of the woman lay in her ability to civilize natives and through her example provide the means by which a nation might become both respectable and moral.

The model of the ‘civilized’ woman however was that of the upper-middle class woman – a woman who could afford not to work in the factories of the new cities, a woman who could afford domestic servants and a woman who could afford to be religious and charity minded... the missionary women to Sāmoa very quickly adopted the role of a 19th century woman of wealth by

351 Ibid. p46  
354 Ibid.
having domestic servants.\textsuperscript{355}

The role played by these missionary wives in a nation such as Samoa is significant for this thesis. Through their work with Samoa’s women, these missionary wives introduced ideas about Christianity and the roles of women.

Throughout recorded history, women appear as accessories to the male man; women are the wives, mothers, daughters and sisters of famous men.\textsuperscript{356} Women were seen as vulnerable and unable to cause events on their own strength and women throughout the Western world were either neglected or deemed insignificant within the greater scheme of things.\textsuperscript{357}

For centuries they were believed to be inferior beings, both physiologically and morally; they were seen as passive objects rather than active agents of history.\textsuperscript{358}

Women throughout the modern world have been overwhelmed and absorbed into the experience and history of male dominance. As a result, scholars are unaware of the lives and actions of women in recorded history. Missionary wives were just as active in the spread of Christianity as were their husbands, in particular when educating large groups of women within their congregation.\textsuperscript{359} Even then, missionary wives were defined by the role of their husbands and their roles were seen as a reflection of women’s roles from their

\textsuperscript{355} Ibid. p162
\textsuperscript{357} Ibid. p8
\textsuperscript{358} Ibid. p9
home cultures.\textsuperscript{360} These missionary wives were expected to be the “unseen traditional homemakers and purveyors of… pious domesticity”.\textsuperscript{361} As discussed by Ross, the number one priority of the missionary wife was to be the support and aid to her husband.\textsuperscript{362} The missionary wife was totally absorbed with her husband’s pursuit of native conversion, consequently the missionary wife was indispensable but, more often than not, went through life as an unnoticed component of her missionary husband’s vocation.\textsuperscript{363}

The missionary house wife regarded herself as an ambassadress for the Christian women of Britain, and she took great pains to cultivate the ‘home of taste’. The table was well-stocked, and the guest at the mission station was possibly afforded the best hospitality which could be offered in the islands.\textsuperscript{364}

Many women who married missionaries did so because they themselves desired to be missionaries, not because they wished to be wives. The latter was a manifestation of the former. Indeed, some of the “missionary ladies were more talented and accomplished then their husbands”.\textsuperscript{365} Missionary wives believed their role in Samoa was to convert the Samoan world-view and culture from that of “barbarism to civilization, from heathenism to Christianity”.\textsuperscript{366} In many ways, ministry for missionaries and their wives was a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid. p13
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{363} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid. p147
\end{flushright}
collaboration; however, it is the underlying idea behind the inclusion of women within Christian ministry that is at the heart of this missionary legacy.\textsuperscript{367}

Missionaries very rarely went to spread the gospel without taking a wife, as the church encouraged that ministry to be done by married couples. There are three reasons as to why male missionaries married before they left for the mission field. Firstly, the presence of a wife usually crossed the language barrier and showed the indigenous peoples that the missionaries came in peace, as women were seen as gentle and their presence would ensure that peace reigned supreme.\textsuperscript{368} Secondly, the presence of a wife lessened the temptation to participate in sexual activity with the native women.\textsuperscript{369} The third and most important of the churches’ reasoning was that the missionary wife “proved an excellent example and role model of feminine behaviour and she could teach useful domestic skills to ‘native’ women”.\textsuperscript{370} The example missionary wives were expected to portray was indeed an example of ‘Christian life’ in Victorian Britain.

Missionary wives were expected to ‘support [their husbands] in their work, run the household, bear and raise children, and together provide the object lesson of a civilised Christian home.’\textsuperscript{371}

Missionaries were more often than not engaged in travel around the villages and regions that fell within the boundaries of their island ministry. While away, the missionary wife would manage and administer the daily operation of their ‘home base’ as well as the

\textsuperscript{369} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{370} Ibid. p15
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid. p15-16
supervision of missionary schools and the curriculum taught to the children. Through this role, the missionary wife would have appeared to the Samoan woman as more than capable of taking over from her male counterpart. Not only that but she would have been seen as independent of her husband’s vocation, which would have given a rather different perception of the Victorian woman to her Samoan converts than was actually the case.  

Samoan girls were prepared for becoming such ‘Victorian’ women, responsible for the morality of the Sāmoan nation, through residing at the Pastor’s house, instead of the traditional Samoan aualuma, and by attending Church schools. The curriculum at such a school, however, would have been very different to that of the traditional aualuma and very much built around domestic responsibility.

The missionary, according to Gunson, was seen as the principal advocate or supporter of civilization, and missionaries saw colonization as the most efficient and trouble free method of increasing and promoting Christian conversion. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that missionaries were an excellent precursor to the arrival of colonial powers, not only in Samoa, but across the Pacific region. Most missionaries saw the benefit of affording a secular education to their congregation as it would not only aid church members in reading and understanding the bible, but would also pave the way for colonial powers, provide an understanding of western economy and promote Christian civilization within the islands.

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373 Ibid.
375 Ibid.
Missionary ideology and teaching spread a Gospel in which women’s priority and rightful place were within the domestic sphere. The role of the pastor was, and in many instances still is, reserved for men and it was common knowledge and publicly accepted that the church was not the setting for women to voice their opinions. Because the role of the pastor or minister was limited to men, missionaries sought to diminish the importance and permeating quality of the idea of feagaiga. The feagaiga as an ideal was outlawed on the basis of the female curse. Missionaries believed that God was the only one with the power and perogative to both bless and curse individuals. This role of the feagaiga was transposed onto the pastors as they were the messengers from God and were the personification of this new relationship between God and the Samoans.

Since the missionaries were the messengers whom God had sent, they would become the bearers of “New Covenant.” The title of feagaiga was transferred to the pastors or ministers. They would become known as the fa’afeagaiga “the Covenant Makers”.

Missionary Legacy in the Samoan Islands and its effect on the perception of Samoan women

The missionary wives who came to Samoa set up women’s church committees through which they controlled the village and in turn, influenced Samoan society as a whole.

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377 Ibid. p220
The church has emerged as one of the most powerful social institutions in Pacific societies and the values imparted by early missionaries persist to this day affecting the acceptance of women…

European contact challenged the cultural practices and assertions of the Samoans; in particular, the effect of European culture can be seen in customs and beliefs pertaining to the female body. European ideas of civilization and Christianity were also assertions of their own cultural and societal standards.

To the 19th Century European missionary the striving for respectability was a predominant occupation and this affected the way they viewed the Sāmoan female body.

Meafou, when asked about missionary legacy, whether there was such a thing, and if so what its influence was on the women of Samoa, answered saying that women have been left with the legacy that they are advisors to their husbands. They keep the house in order and do most of the domestic chores. Another part of this legacy is the idea that women’s primary concern is that of childbearing and rearing. Meafou also made the comment that, as part of the missionary legacy, the idea that daughters remain at home with their parents/mothers, until they are old enough to be married, has been incorporated into Samoan society.

Despite their financial input, women are excluded from political power within the church structure, with church teachings portraying them solely as wives and mothers. Women’s Committees, which correspond to a feminine

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equivalent of the fono, give women limited political voice but only within
traditional power structures. The church, therefore, entrenches women’s
subordinate position and magnifies the claim of male elder to traditional
maatai-based authority.\textsuperscript{381}

When asked if she [Meafou] feels that the legacy left by early missionaries has
shaped the way women are seen and are expected to behave within the church, she replied
saying:

\begin{quote}
I believe so; because, today, once women get married, they tend to stay
home and don’t work anymore. They look after their newborn child and
are expected to manage the house chores. It is almost normal to blame the
mother when guests arrive to a house and it’s messy. Usually the mother
is blamed because it’s an obligation that is vested on her shoulders; being
a mother and wife.\textsuperscript{382}
\end{quote}

The Church taught that men were the head of the household. This philosophy
changed the family dynamic in that what had once been a situation of democracy and equal
voice within the home, became a situation more akin to that of leader and follower, where
the participation of women was discouraged. Those women who chose to speak up were
not only punished by their husbands but were isolated from ‘Christian’, god-fearing society
as it was seen as going against the teachings, beliefs and practices of the church.

To Christian missionaries… the “good Christian” was the good, “civilized”
man or woman on the European model… there was considerable pressure
brought to bear upon local populations to conform to the missionaries’ ideas
of proper behaviour in the secular aspects of life as well as in the religious
sphere.\textsuperscript{383}

\textsuperscript{381} Cribb, Jo and Barnett, Ross (1999). ‘Being Bashed: Western Samoan Women’s responses to domestic
violence in Western Samoa and New Zealand.’ Gender. Place and Culture. Vol. 6 (No. 1).
\textsuperscript{382} Meafou (2008) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.
\textsuperscript{383} Roach, Elizabeth Marchette (1984). ‘From English Mission to Samoan Congregation: Women and the
Church in Rural Western Samoa’. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Columbia University. p4
The 19th century church housed an hierarchy that not only validated but enforced the subordination of women. Samoan women, the rightful feagaiga, overnight were written out of the decision-making processes within Samoan religiosity and were relegated to the more tedious, functional and domestic spheres of Christian and church life.\(^{384}\)

Missionary influence discouraged women from entering the political arena, introduced divorce, outlawed polygamy, and reoriented the status of women from a position of complementary equality as sisters, to the biblical role of wives. The status attached to women’s role within the extended family was diminished and, as a consequence, most women currently only enjoy limited participation in political affairs.\(^{385}\)

The woman’s role within contemporary religion and Christian society is parallel to the role of Samoan women as wives; they are the support for all that goes on within the Church. The woman’s role within the church community is parallel to their role within the village. Today, religion and culture have become inextricably intertwined, and the roles, in both these institutions, are a reflection of their roles in the other.

As a female member of my church, I am expected to help in the cleaning, Sunday school, food preparation and ensuring that all the women of the church are working together for the good of the village. If you were to look at Samoan culture and then see what my corresponding role in the church is, then it would have to be as a wife. My role is to be the bride of Christ and his church.\(^{386}\)

Meafou corroborates this idea, when looking at the absorption of the institutions of culture and religion within the Samoan understanding. She has said that religion has blended well with the Samoan way of life.


\(^{385}\) Cribb, Jo and Barnett, Ross (1999). 'Being Bashed: Western Samoan Women's responses to domestic violence in Western Samoa and New Zealand.' Gender. Place and Culture. Vol. 6 (No. 1).

Most religions, for example the Catholic Church, have begun to use more and more of Samoa’s traditional practices within their worship. Many pastors and their wives have experienced a life of prestige as shown to them by their congregation; as they wish to continue that fa’asamoa practice within their own religions.³⁸⁷

When asked about the fairness and equal treatment of women within contemporary Samoan religion, Meafou also says that women are definitely unequal in status to males because in most cases women in church are put into positions where they are not given any leadership responsibilities.

For example, they do not conduct any church services; they are often given or put into places where cooking and other related chores are done. Their voices are always suppressed in most committees and/or conference settings. Their recognition as equals to their male counterparts is almost phased out completely. Recently, this has changed but still in some cases or situations women’s inferiority is very much alive and maintained by the male hierarchy that dominates the churches within Samoa.³⁸⁸

From the above assertions, the contradictions that exist in regards to women’s position within contemporary Samoan society become evident. Within Christian culture, there is a secular and spiritual realm, the issue here is caused by the fact that Samoan culture also has a secular and spiritual realm, and the scope of each is contradictory to the other. Women, within Samoa, are expected to bridge the gap between culture and Christianity in a way that upholds Samoan traditions, but also encourages and upholds the teachings of Christianity and the bible. Gunson illustrates this conundrum by saying that:

In the secular world the co-operation of chiefs was often the only way to effect social reforms, but in spiritual matters it was through the church

³⁸⁸ Ibid.
members rather than the secular authorities that the real changes were made.\(^{389}\)

Here Gunson is talking of secular and spiritual in regards to the church, however, within the cultural realm, the idea of reform or change is different. This difference has caused many issues for both males and females within Samoan understanding. Culturally, if there was to be social reform, then such change would be effected at the family level. Culture is changed one family at a time. However, on the spiritual side of this discussion, women were very much involved in these decisions due to their sacred role as the *feagaiga*.

The missionaries were effective in banning publicly sanctioned defloration ceremonies and the sexually explicit night dances, in altering Sāmoan hairstyles, dress sense and notions of modesty and changing chiefly marriages to polygamous to monogamous and at the centre of these changes stands the discourse of ‘civilizing’ and the Victorian perception of women – as moral guardians of the nation….the wives of missionaries played their part in the 19\(^{th}\) Century Sāmoan cultural transformation.\(^{390}\)

**The Indigenisation of Western Christianity**

While there were many aspects of traditional Samoan religion that were transferred and incorporated into the practice of Christianity, there were also many changes that came about due to the presence and influence of missionaries and the Christian religion within Samoa.


Samoans had taken to Christianity with a vengeance soon after the first missionaries arrived around 1830. By the 1860’s the majority of the population were Christian, the majority of Samoan children were attending missionary schools, many were literate and read the only text available in Samoa, the Bible.\textsuperscript{391}

Many traditional practices have been able to function and find expression within Christianity whilst still serving their traditional function.\textsuperscript{392} One example of this can be seen within the practice of the ava ceremony, which is performed within all ceremonial, cultural and religious events in Samoa. In ancient times, before partaking of the ava, participants would pour a portion of the liquid onto the ground and toast ‘pagan’ or traditional gods, today however the saying \textit{ia fa’amanuia le atua} ‘god bless’ is recited before each individual partakes of the ava, giving praise to Jehovah, the God of Christianity.\textsuperscript{393}

Some missionaries were so taken with their Samoan converts as to believe them to be the lost tribe of Israel.\textsuperscript{394}

Even though a physical attack was not carried out on the Samoans in the process of conversion to Christianity we, as scholars, can only imagine the identity and cultural crises the Samoan people went through at the evolution of their traditional ideas and beliefs.

We perceive what we believe, and what we believe is shaped by hereditary and cultural factors that bend reality to look the way we are taught it should

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid. p247
\end{thebibliography}

This change in belief system, worship and faith would have resulted in an about-face and total disregard for the hereditary and historical aspect of Samoan traditional belief. However, this crisis would have been greatly lessened by the eventual indigenization of the Christian religion. The Samoan people have found expression within the structure and beliefs of Christianity, a method very much akin to the practices and norms of the traditional belief system of ancient times.\footnote{Hempenstall, Peter (2004). 'Manuscript XV –On missionaries and cultural change in Samoa.' \textit{The Journal of Pacific History}. 39(2). 241 - 50.} As Iofi argues, the reception of Christianity in Samoa was aided by the many similarities that existed between the pre-Christian beliefs of the Samoans and the Christian teachings of the missionaries.\footnote{Iofi, Faafouina (1980). \textit{Samoan Cultural Values and Christian Thought: An Attempt to Relate Samoan Traditional Values to Christian Understanding}. Claremont University Press.} Robson points out that both the institutions of Christianity and the ideals of the \textit{fa'asamoa} recognize and put emphasis on the well-being of the individual as part and parcel of the well-being of the community.\footnote{Robson, Andrew E. (2009). 'Malietoa. Williams and Samoa's Embrace of Christianity'. \textit{The Journal of Pacific History}. 44 (1).} Family, village and district \textit{matai} have become the mouthpiece and mediator, bridging the gap between the people and God.\footnote{Hempenstall, Peter (2004). 'Manuscript XV –On missionaries and cultural change in Samoa.' \textit{The Journal of Pacific History}. 39(2). 241 - 50.}

Christianity, instead of bursting the bonds of the old life, has been eaten up by it.\footnote{Tagaloa, Misipouena Suacesi (2008). 'Tafesilafa'i: Towards a Samoan Epistemology in the Diaspora'. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Claremont University. p116}

Meafou, when asked how much culture has influenced the practice of her religion, responded by saying that the presence of culture has influenced religion immensely.
However, she emphasizes the preferential treatment and cultural status given to *faifeau* or pastors; an observation that Suluga also agrees with. The life of a *faifeau* revolves around the respect that is unique to each and every Samoan, which is based on his or her ability to provide hospitality to anyone in the church, not only in respect to material goods, but also spiritually.\(^{401}\)

Suluga made the comment that the Samoan culture has been extremely influential in regards to the practising of religion in many ways. The Samoan culture has been extremely supportive of Christianity since it was introduced in Samoa. There are times when religion is practised during cultural ceremonies. The village council puts the church ministers as their main priority in everything. The *mana* that culturally belongs to *matai* has been transferred to the Christian minister/pastor. In a cultural gathering, usually a prayer must be offered before the *ava* ceremony.\(^{402}\)

While the indigenization of Christianity saved the Samoans from total cultural upheaval, it also allowed the cultural stigma of honour, respect and ultimate cultural power to be superimposed upon the Samoan pastor. Hempenstall raises the issue of the privileged cultural status of the Christian minister, questioning the reasoning behind the “privileged economic position of the Samoan pastor”.\(^{403}\) This privileged position has in fact led to the aspirations of many to become pastors rather than become family *matai*. Why? It is down to the fact that:

\[^{402}\text{Suluga (2008) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.}\]
…by the village the Faifeau is considered ‘o le sui o le atua’ – the personal representative or substitute of the Christian god Jehovah. Like the Shaman of old, he is looked upon as the mouthpiece, as an intermediary between the village and the god they worship…

As Hempenstall continues, from the practical and more functional side of things, the roles and expectations put upon both traditional pre-Christian ‘shamans’ and modern Christian pastors or ministers are so close in essence that they are almost indistinguishable.

The ability of women to lead and participate within decision-making forums was seen as a threat to the missionaries at the most, and at the very least would have been cause for confusion. While the Samoan people understood the dynamics of complementary leadership and participation, and also knew of the security and protection afforded them through the leadership of women such as Salamasina and Nafanua, missionaries did not, nor if they had known, could they have acknowledged this aspect of social norm.

The threat this posed to the foreign missionary movement and the role of men in the church would have presented the first missionaries with a dilemma. As a consequence, or perhaps more so an inability to deal with Samoa’s reality, no negotiations or consultations were held between Samoan women and the missionaries. The roles of the missionary’s wife became the epitome for all Samoan women.

Due to the common experience that Western religion and Samoan culture have undergone, there is an interconnectedness between the two, making it now impossible to take religion out of culture and vice versa. Suluga has argued that the interconnectedness is one of the histories of Samoa.

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404 Ibid.
405 Ibid.
407 Ibid. p219
Before Christianity was introduced to Samoa, we had one goddess by the name of Nafanua. She prophesied that Samoa’s head of governance would come from heaven. In 1830, John Williams arrived in Sapapalii, Savaii. This marked the beginning of the Christian era in Samoa, and the fulfilment of Nafanua’s prophecy. Since then, religion has been incorporated into Samoan culture. And the two go hand in hand. The culture supports religion, and vice versa.408

Peggy makes an interesting observation, and in doing so, reiterates the aspect of this absorption of religion into the culture that this chapter is attempting to emphasise. Peggy has said that religion in Samoa is almost on a par with the fa’asamoa, almost the same thing. Peggy also pointed out that in many main-stream churches there is an unquestioning obedience to the pastor and elders; and very little in-depth analysis of Christian principles or debate on these.409

**Samoan Christianity and Women’s role**

The teachings of the church… with the ideal woman seen as pure; submissive to her husband hence should not be exposed to… society.410

When discussing the role and expectations that are put upon women within the church setting, the interview participants’ views varied, however, all centred on the same principle, mentioned by Suluga. Suluga said that as a member of a Samoan congregation she is expected to live a Christ-like life by obeying God’s commandments, attending Church every Sunday and fulfilling assignments given by the minister during weekdays. It

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is her role to be honest and attend all church meetings, for there are matters that are discussed in those meetings that are very helpful for the development of the congregation. Suluga pointed out that she is expected to assist the Mothers’ Association and participate in Bible Studies. Also, if assigned, she needs to participate in the Annual Women’s Conference of the Church. One of the major expectations is to be a member of various committees of the Church.\textsuperscript{411}

Many of the traditional roles of women within the practice of traditional Samoan religion have been transposed onto Christianity, especially those of teacher, nurturer, caregiver and diplomat. The practice and belief of Christianity that is evident within Samoan society today presents very little similarity to the form of Christianity found in the churches from which they were born.\textsuperscript{412} The women’s role in contemporary religion is parallel to the role of women in Samoan society. They are the support for all that goes on within the church. Their role within the church community is parallel to their role within the village. Today, religion and culture have become inextricably intertwined, and the roles, in both these institutions, are a reflection of their role in the other.

Women, within the church, take care of the church members. They control the division of village goods; this encouraged the use of women’s skills as diplomat and negotiator, as the division of goods is always bringing issues of fairness to the fore. These women also take care of the children, men, and chiefs within the village. This is where we see the nurturing and care-giving that Samoan women have upheld and maintained

throughout Samoan history. Each village has a church, a faife’au and his faletua (wife). The faletua can be understood better in this context by seeing her as the “backbone of industry”. Without her, everything would fall apart. “She is the spine that holds the body upright”. The faletua and the women of the church were, and still are, in charge of the pastor’s school, which were used to help children learn about the bible, learn how to read and write, and about the importance of living a Christian life. The woman’s primary role within the church is that of support staff. Women are also in charge of the choir, the upkeep of the pastor’s house, the church and the church grounds. Women also play a large role in the education of children with regards to the bible, and the leading of Sunday school classes or pastor’s schools. This aspect of modern religion, or western Christianity, has utilized the traditional role of women as teachers, and most likely, women were used to teach so that there was less resistance to the spread of Christianity within the Samoan nation.

The role of the women’s fellowship is crucial in the life of the church and village community. Within the Congregational Christian Church, this groups is referred to as le mafutaga a tina, literally translated “women’s fellowship”, and in the Methodist church as le auso, translated as “the sisterhood”. These women’s groups are responsible to providing pastoral care in matters pertaining to women’s issues and the practical day-to-day running of the church, the village, and the family. Women also controlled the roster of which family was to cook for the pastor and his family. If we are to understand the full extent to which women worked towards upholding the welfare and well being of Samoan people, not only as individuals, but as communities,

414 Ibid. p223

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villages, districts and consequently, as a nation then it is imperative to maintain an idea of women’s roles within traditional Samoan religion. Within traditional religion, women were crucial in the maintenance and endorsement of personal well being, and this role has been transposed into the modern context. In addition, in traditional Samoan religion, success and well-being were the reward for the individual and family that were good stewards of the gifts god had provided. This concept is the same within Samoan Christianity.

When discussing success and well-being of the Samoan woman Suluga states that success in Samoa is regarded as a reward for loyalty and integrity. It also reflects the kind of person you are and the family you come from. This success can be in a form of educational achievements, business accomplishments, sporting victories and in the political arena. Success in Samoa can be shared among family and villages, for a successful person will bring honour to any organization of which they are a part. There is no such thing as individual success or individual well being. The welfare and success of the individual are fundamentally based on the welfare and success of the group as a whole. “My child’s success is my own success, my child’s failures are my own failures and vice versa”. 415

Meafou, however, emphasized the fact that success and communal well being to the contemporary Samoan woman is having a good family, an organised family, having an excellent academic background and a well-paid job to care for parents. 416 Peggy points out the idea that success for a Samoan woman (and perhaps all women) is knowing that you have raised your children well – having well mannered, educated and caring children. 417

From all the interview participants, there was a great emphasis on the idea of success and well being as being a reflection of their children’s achievements. The well being of individuals, as illustrated by the above interview excerpts, is very much linked with the communal well being of their family, their village, their district and their nation.

Samoa now needs to stand back and assess the state of the nation over the last one hundred and sixty years. In the process of missionisation, what are the benefits that Samoa has gained? What has it lost as a consequence?^418

While there are numerous inconsistencies that have come to the fore when looking at the role of women within Christian religion, it is imperative that we remember the various camps within which women operate: culture, public life, Church and family.

There is a tendency within works written by scholars who are working within a western frame to demonize missionaries, their work and their legacy. This may be due to Christianity, or religion, not being as important within western culture today, as it was during this period, or it may be down to the fact that missionaries really were a negative influence. Whatever the case, this thesis does not take a stance on missionary influence being negative or positive, it merely seeks to acknowledge that there was an influence upon society. It is not my intention to demonize or nullify the work missionaries, and their wives, carried out, it is my intention, however, to draw attention to the influence their actions, ideals and cultural understandings have had on the gender roles and relationships within Samoan society. The following chapter will discuss the evolution of culture and women’s roles, as well as the inconsistencies that have come about as a result of this evolution. It will

provide an in-depth discussion of the various roles and the status women held in pre-
Christian Samoan society as opposed to the roles they now have today.\textsuperscript{419} What must be noted once again at this point is the apparent inconsistencies and contradictory nature of the roles and status women hold. In reading the following chapters, it is important to keep in mind that these contradictions and inconsistencies are indeed part and parcel of what it means to be a Samoan woman in a world that is rapidly changing. Again, this thesis does not look to make judgement, but merely observe the evolution of womens roles.

A woman’s role in the home, family, society and in the workplace is the topic of discussion in the chapter that follows. Women are seen as the ultimate source of cultural knowledge within society. While it can be argued that this is the case with women all over the world, Samoa’s situation is one that is unique to the Pacific. A Samoan woman’s role is very much centered on several different factors: their marital status, their position in society, their family’s reputation and their age. While much of a Samoan woman’s role is determined by these factors there do exist pre-determined obligations and roles that women must perform which are prescribed by the norms and expectations of both Samoan culture and tradition.

Different roles exist for females of different ages. The complex nature of Samoan hierarchy can be seen and understood through the example of women and their changing roles. While there is still much to learn about Samoan society, which is in itself ever...
changing, the little that can be seen by those outside the culture is the appearance of inequality between Samoan males and females. Samoan society appears to be patriarchal and oppressive towards those of lower social standing and particularly towards women. However, what must be understood is that, unlike many western cultures, the Samoan culture, in its purest form, is focused on and around the family. The value placed on women and their varying roles can only be fully gauged when we take into account the central importance of the family in Samoan society. Across all cultures people make assumptions about the status of women based on the surface value of a culture; and unfortunately this is a part of human nature that is unlikely to change. Peggy points out an integral aspect to understanding the relationship between Samoan males and females.

The feagaiga sets the boundaries of action between brothers and sisters, between aualuma and aumaga and between pastors and congregation. Respect is the main cement in these processes. Also, women defer to brothers, while males protect their sisters. The relationship is still a relationship of complementarity.  

This chapter will start by looking into the role of women in Samoan society, with an in-depth discussion of the various terminologies and concepts used to explain the roles of Samoan women. These meanings, whilst rather simplistic, offer an insight into the way women are viewed in Samoa, as well as their cultural standing. It must be noted before this discussion takes place that in many instances, many of the definitions, and much of the cultural emphasis that will be discussed, is/are European recordings of Samoan custom. This chapter will then cover a number of topics: women within the Samoan economy;
women as teachers; women and existing cultural boundaries; women within Samoa’s modern political history, including their participation in the Mau movement; equality within the modern nation, and their role in business. This chapter will then be rounded off by looking at critical issues for Samoan women, the choice, opportunities and constraints within Samoan society and the change in women’s roles over time.

Women in Traditional Samoa

All interview participants were asked for their opinion on the role of Samoan women within traditional society. Many of the answers referred to the same concepts and most agreed with Suluga’s view of the traditional role. Suluga pointed out that a Samoan woman attends and participates in women’s organizations. She looks after the cleaning up of the community and is a member of the village health committee. Women also attend and participate in weaving committees.423

Participant E stated that the role of Samoan women in traditional Samoan society was that of healer, teacher, priestess, maker of economic wealth, keeper of the lore/history of a family, peacemaker, redeemer, sister and nurturer.424 Peggy simply stated that there were two roles for women to uphold and these were of sister and wife.425 Participant J went on to further expand on both these explanations of the role of women in traditional Samoan society, stating that:

You had the mother who raises the children, and looked after the family, then you had the daughter who supported her mother and father. Sisters are very important in terms of knowledge of lineage and background of the family, sometimes it is the women who are more well versed in the knowledge of ancestors and distinct lines of the family. I think women are more like the gatekeeper to all the knowledge, maybe guardian is a better term. They ensure that the children are well versed in fa’asamoa and how the relationship between the brother and sister, children, parents and elders are maintained, as they are the ones that spend the most time with children. That is why sisters are very important, because, unlike wives who come later on in a man’s life, sisters are there from the beginning. They were also charged with the financial wealth of the family.\textsuperscript{426}

Participant J then went on to say the following:

I also think that women were seen as the centre and source of social and cultural knowledge. Mainly due to my view of a woman’s role being that of a guardian to the wealth of knowledge of Samoan culture. I’ve always been taught that the sister protects her brother. It is true that the brother makes the decisions and directs the family, however, it is the sister who forms the foundation of the male’s authority, it is also the woman who advises. Women are at the centre of decision making.\textsuperscript{427}

From all accounts, the role of women in traditional Samoan society involved or included all the common roles understood today such as, mother, daughter, sister and house keeper. However, the women of the pre-Christian era held much more status within society, and in essence, were the heartbeat of traditional Samoan society.

Participant H stated that the woman was the carrier of the gafa, ‘genealogy’; that women had their own place in society alongside the men.\textsuperscript{428} Women had roles that were

\textsuperscript{427} Ibid.
clearly defined and it was not one on top of the other but a relationship where they sat together.\footnote{Ibid.} This idea is corroborated by the arguments of Suluga who said that for each male institution, there is an equal and corresponding female institution. For the \textit{fono a matai}, ‘the meeting of chiefs’, there is the female group \textit{faletua ma tausi}. For the \textit{aumaga}, ‘the group of untitled men’, there is the \textit{ausaluma}.\footnote{Suluga (2008) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.} The \textit{fono a matai} cannot function without the support of the \textit{faletua ma tausi} and the \textit{aumaga} is void of meaning without the presence of the \textit{ausaluma}. From arrangements such as feasting and hosting visiting parties to village politics and sanitation, the roles of male and females groups are very much complementary. These societal groups function together rather than one dictating to the other.

Lemau argues that the woman’s role in pre-Christian Samoa was as an adviser to her husband and that the Samoan woman has an obligation to ensure she lives a life that is not against what she values.\footnote{Lemau (2008) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.}

Women in traditional times effectively controlled the distribution and production of material wealth, things such as fine mats (\textit{ie toga}) and bark cloth (\textit{tapa}).\footnote{Tagaloa, Aiono Dr. Fanaafi Le (n.d.). 'The Social Status and the Economic Roles of the Females in Traditional and Modern Samoan Society'. Samoa: National University of Samoa (Iunivesite-o-Samo).} Not only were women the producers of traditional wealth, women were also involved with the construction of housing and made the thatching that constituted the roof of the Samoan \textit{fale}, ‘house’.\footnote{Macpherson, Cluny and Macpherson, Laavasa (1990). \textit{Samoan Medical Belief and Practice}. Auckland. New Zealand: Auckland University Press.} The building of a Samoan \textit{fale} is time intensive and is not only a physical
task but to the Samoan is a very spiritual undertaking. There are strict laws, beliefs and codes to follow, certain prayers are associated with construction, as well as sacrifices and offerings to traditional gods. The fact that women were included within this process shows a great deal of equality and ability on the women’s part. From the proverb, *e au le ina’ilau a tama’ita’i*, talking of the thatching of a Samoan house we can see that this narrative has led to the belief that women can achieve success and “good fortune” because they are not only diligent and most importantly, consistent. This proverb refers to the famous female leaders of Samoa and holds them in the same light as the women who completed the thatching in Falealupo.

All the leaders I know that are women all have the same traits. They stand up for what they believe in, they show courage, but also restraint. The family comes first, before their husbands and even before themselves, she will not rest until her job is done and communal good is upheld.

Not only were women involved in the production of goods and materials, women were also involved in the construction of materials used for the transportation and gifting of food. Food is an essential aspect of Samoan life and a serious undertaking. Most of the cooking in traditional times was carried out by the men, whereas, women were in control

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435 Ibid.
of the distribution of this food. Food was communally cooked and then shared throughout the village.440

Women never used to cook, that was a job for the men. Women would control the division and transport of the food. They made decisions on who would get what. When Christianity came along, this all changed.441

Women were involved in village committees that worked alongside or parallel to the matai councils within villages and districts. These committees were in charge of the distribution of goods, the welfare of its members, and the sanitation and supply of water.442 Women, and especially these women’s committees, were also the executive arm of the council of Matai. If a decision was made, the women were enlisted to aid in the carrying out of these decisions.443 If the women of the village did not agree with these decisions they were made null and void as there was no one to enact them. Women were also the doctors of traditional Samoa. Much of the medical practice and beliefs that relate to them were carried out by the women, and only passed down from mother to daughter or from grandmother to grand-daughter. There were males who carried out these duties, however, a majority of these ‘doctors’ were female.444

Through the above discussion the complementarity of the roles resting upon both men and women becomes evident. When looking at Peggy’s answer, the permeating

influence of the *feagaiga* also takes prominent position. However, we also see another important role that has not yet been talked about in-depth, and that is the role of women as wives. Women in their natal villages hold relatively high status, however, once a woman is married and leaves her natal village, her role and status is not influenced by her family or the previous status she held, but becomes intertwined with the role and status of her spouse. The role of the Samoan woman as a wife is the lowest societal ranking a woman can hold. On a recent visit to Samoa, it finally became clear to me that the reason this rule is upheld is so that the ranking and role of women within their natal villages can be maintained. This is so that women always have a place to go where their voices are heard, where they are protected and where they can play a crucial role in decision making forums. Again, it is the idea that the Samoan woman has choices; she can choose to live and have her role within society determined by the status of her husband, or she can remain in her natal village and maintain her high status. When married, a woman’s role is to support her husband, raise her children and serve her husband’s family. This role becomes her world, and she is expected to rely completely on and trust her husband to provide for herself and their children.

The following section will discuss the participation of women within business, modern politics and their role in the emergence of a modern nation.

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446 Ibid.
Material and Economic Wealth of Samoa

The economic and traditional material wealth of Samoa consisted of the handicrafts and handiwork of Samoan women. The intricate weaving of fine mats, which could take years to finish, and the making and dyeing of bark cloth, were both labour and time intensive, as well as being back-breaking work.

The traditional fine mat of Samoa, the ie toga, still continues to function as the highest ranking item in the total Samoan exchange system.\(^{448}\)

This material wealth of Samoa was and still is known as measina o Samoa the ‘treasures of Samoa’. If we are to apply reason to this equation, then logic argues that because women are the creators of Samoan treasures, they themselves are treasures as well, and in turn were and will be treated thus.

Some of my fondest childhood memories centre on my grandmother. The weaving of mats was an ever present focus of her free time. Whilst I myself, unfortunately, never caught-on to the importance of the fine mat in the life of a Samoan woman, she maintained that the mat was a symbol of womanhood and a female’s tautua or service to her family. My grandmother used to tell me stories of the great fine mats of Samoa, and that within the mats lay the history of our people, of their power, their pride, their conflicts and times of peace; in essence, these mats were the equivalent of the history books I so faithfully studied in school.

Subsistence Based Society and Women in Samoan Economy

Prior to the emergence of a new nation and economy, Samoans participated and structured society around the idea of subsistence living. The following section will be a discussion on the role of women within this form of economic venture, their participation and the effect this participation has on the nation as a whole. When talking about subsistence living, it is essential that examples are provided to illustrate this state of existence. Within Samoan society, the projected weekly income is that of WST$1,108,000.00/week home grown/produced items used by households.449 The idea of subsistence living within this thesis is illustrated by looking at the percentage of weekly household income that is put towards various uses. This will provide the reader with an understanding of traditional Samoan subsistence living and how these ideas have been transposed onto modern day life. On average, $512,000.00 per week of home-grown or produced items are sold by households and $243,000 per week of these home-grown and produced items are given as gifts.450 A rather large portion of the goods produced at home are given as gifts. Roughly half of the total amount of home grown or produced goods are sold to generate income for the family, and the rest, which equates to roughly a quarter of Samoa’s produce is kept for family usage:451

…while some women gain new avenues to power and increase their status, many others are becoming marginalized. Women in Apia, like elsewhere in the developing world, are more likely than men to be unemployed or

450 Ibid.
451 Ibid.
As a way of understanding the status women hold in the Samoan economy we must look at the status women are given and the nature of the employment they undertake. In 2001, employment estimates showed that 35,118 males were employed within Samoa compared to the 15,207 females who held paid positions. As you can see from these estimates, there are at least 50% more males employed within the economic sector. Females, within the employment market, are usually given jobs that fall under the categories of secretary, retail assistant, hospitality, clerks and cleaners, whereas males are more likely to be employed in office and management jobs. Of the females employed, 69% of these females are in sales and services. By contrast, of the 35,118 males employed in Samoa only 21% of these males are in sales and services. Women are very much under-represented within the economic system of Samoa.

Another aspect of the Samoan woman’s involvement in the economy is in that of small businesses. There are four main reasons that women become involved in or start their own small businesses. These four reasons being: (1) to support their families, (2) to meet the school fees for their children, (3) to honour and meet any church contributions and (4)

452 Cribb, Jo and Barnett, Ross (1999). 'Being Bashed: Western Samoan Women’s responses to domestic violence in Western Samoa and New Zealand.' Gender. Place and Culture. Vol. 6 (No. 1).
454 Ibid.
“to meet social commitments such as donations for fa’alavelave”.\(^{456}\) This new need or desire for cash within Samoan society has caused a sort of moral dilemma for women. Samoan women are faced with a choice of whether they uphold Christian teaching of being the helpmeet to her husband, or go out and earn money to support the family, which ironically is a return to their traditional roles. This raises causal conundrums for women. Traditionally women controlled the Samoan economy through the production of fine mats and tapa cloth. Christianity then taught them to allow men to support the family in terms of finances. Now, women are required to revert to their traditional roles. What this has resulted in is the appearance of woman’s oppression within the Samoan system. Upon re-entering the market place, the roles and status of Samoan women are now compared, understood and evaluated through Western ideals of opportunity, equality and value. Shadrake and van Dierman argue that the “traditional form of fa’asamoa can be seen in terms of; (a) pule (authority), (b) status, and (c) tautua (service)”.\(^{457}\) If this is the case, then it is these three concepts or instances that can both hinder and/or encourage women’s participation within modern Samoan economy. Shadrake and Dierman look at the relationship between these concepts of the involvement of women in the Samoan economy. The first of these, pule, can be simply understood as individual authority, and in this instance, more importantly, it is the ability and prerogative of those wielding pule to be in command of the division of labour, the allocation of resources and the resolution of any arguments that may arise within the extended family over land and resources. This role is


\(^{457}\) Ibid. p2
mainly exercised by family and village matai.\textsuperscript{458} In this context, the conundrum is that as female heirs, women have the same rights and pule as male members of their family. This means that they also have equal rights to land. Although equal rights exist, as land is communally governed and allocated, if anyone (not just women) were to start a business based on the agricultural properties of family land, they run the risk of losing this land after they have planted their crop.\textsuperscript{459}

The foundation of the Samoan economy and fā’aSamoa was subsistence agriculture based on descent group tenure and ownership of land, and for social and political institutions to have changed, the system of land tenure would have had to change. The Samoan system made economic individualism impossible.\textsuperscript{460}

The second of these concepts, status, raises yet another conundrum for Samoan women. When a woman is seen as selling goods people might infer that the family is poor, or that her husband/father/brother is not providing for her needs. On the other hand, women’s traditional role of catering and caring for her family, and her traditional role of economic wealth maker, form the background to female participation, and her involvement in small business is merely an extension of her traditional roles.\textsuperscript{461} Status and pule are caught in a never-ending spiral; the more pule one wields, the more status one has, the higher one’s status, and the greater pule afforded that individual. A person’s status can be

\textsuperscript{458} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{461} Ibid.
forged through a number of different ways, but mainly through a synthesis of ideas, roles
and expectations from one’s extended family and through the third concept of tautua or
service.\textsuperscript{462}

The social standing and perception of family name is very important to us. Everything I do as an individual affects this status. If I fail, it is seen as a failure for my family. On the other hand, if I succeed, my success is not only mine, it belongs to everyone. The same goes for my job, if I get a good job, that matches my family status, then I increase their status, if my job is seen to be below my family status, then I am doing the opposite.\textsuperscript{463}

There are two facets to the relationship of status and business that are important to point out in this context. Success within the economic setting means that people and families can contribute more towards their family, church and community, which in turns increases their status. Paradoxically, many businesses and people have failed or come quite close to ruin as they are put under pressure to maintain their status by “distributing stock or cash, or entertaining at business expense”.\textsuperscript{464}

Shadrake and van Dierman discuss the aspect of tautua and how adherence to this cultural norm creates incentives for individuals, male and female, to start their own businesses. Tautua in this context is the provision and payment of tribute towards the matai, it is also a duty for each individual to share their resources with their family.

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\textsuperscript{462} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{463} Participant L (2010) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.
The duty to share has three elements: (a) the duty to share with family; (b) the duty to share with the community, particularly by giving donations for *fa’alavelave* (communal events such as funerals or investitures); and (c) the duty to give to the Church.\(^{465}\)

There is one thing that must be understood when attempting to understand women’s economic participation, and indeed male participation, and that is the fact that *fa’asamoana* will be ever present. The presence of *fa’asamoana* in the economy can be either a burden or an encouragement to participation. It can indeed be the boundary that inhibits women from participating as pride comes into play. The greatest obstacle to female participation is the opinion and social judgment of the communities in which they reside. There are several factors women must keep at the forefront of their desire to enter into business:

1. They must uphold, maintain and work to increase the status of their family.

   Traditional Samoan custom tells us that the female, in the form of the *tama’ita’i* and *feagaiga*, is the honour and pride of her family; this ideal has been transposed into the business sector.

2. Their participation in business can be interpreted as a failure on the part of her brother to provide for his sister and family. This carries a lot of weight in the Samoan psyche.

\(^{465}\) Ibid. p3
3. Women’s cultural roles may indeed give them the skills they need to run and participate in business; however, it is becoming apparent that both males and females believe that women should focus their abilities on traditional tasks.\textsuperscript{466}

This ambiguity creates a dilemma for women which is becoming more acute as Western values enter fa’asamoa.\textsuperscript{467} However contradictory to the findings above, Peggy has said that women in business have an easier pathway, because business acumen has become an accepted and valued trait. On the other hand, Peggy argues that the nature of Samoa’s subsistence economy makes it hard for them to sell goods – when they could perhaps be given away. Similarly with debts – males will let these slide (but women will front up to request that debts be paid – because they know that they need this money for school fees) females also work extremely hard at business ventures – again to raise money for the family. It was also noted that women usually do not spend their money on personal goods but on family goods (difference with male spending patterns – beer, gambling).\textsuperscript{468}

Peggy has illustrated an important aspect of the Samoan economy and women’s involvement. This is the idea that women are better in the business setting because their main focus is family welfare and is not solely focused on individual pride and reputation. Women are willing to do whatever it takes to better their families. This is not to say that males in Samoa do not have the same ideals, this is merely a generalization of the Samoan economic situation and participation. What this statement is attempting to suggest is that women, generally, work with the family’s best interests at the forefront of her being, influencing her actions and business decisions, whereas males have a tendency to act to protect their own pride and personal standing within the community.

\textsuperscript{466} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{467} Ibid. p7
The cultural think-tank: women as teachers and facilitators

Cultural boundaries are ideas and attitudes that hinder the progression and participation of women within societies, including government and business. By looking at cultural boundaries it is possible to identify and find a way of solving the problems or issues that are inherent in the cultural limitations imposed upon Samoan women. If the problems women face are deemed cultural, then culture can be the solution, but if the problems are seen as political, then society must act to counter these problems.

Participant E, when asked about women as the source of cultural knowledge, replied that women were indeed a source but not the source. Participant E believes that this depends on the expertise and participation of women in areas such as the healer, teacher, priestess, maker of economic wealth, keeper of the lore/history of a family, peacemaker, redeemer, sister, and nurturer.469

Peggy has said that although the roles of teacher and facilitator are often assigned to women, males also have their domains of knowledge that are shared with others at fono and other discussion forums within the context of Samoan culture.470

Suluga believes that women are the source of societal norms and cultural knowledge, illustrating this statement by stating the fact that more and more women are taking up matai titles. More women are actively involved in village councils. Some are

village mayors, some are members of Parliament, cabinet ministers, heads of government departments, principals in government schools as well as church and private schools.\textsuperscript{471}

All the interview participants argued that women see themselves as the knowledge source of Samoan society. They are the keepers of Samoan pre-Christian history; according to interview participants, they are the teachers, healers and the nurturers of Samoan society. However, with this in mind, Peggy has also pointed out an important aspect of Samoan society, and indeed any indigenous society. There are different forms of knowledge for both men and women. This brings to mind the complementarity of the gender roles within both traditional and modern Samoan society. The knowledge of the women and the knowledge of the men fit together to make a well-rounded understanding of the Samoan worldview and their cultural norms. This is not to say that one is more important than the other. This question on the views of the participants about the role of women as the ‘cultural think-tanks’ of Samoan society was somewhat of a loaded question, since the participants might naturally believe themselves to be the central focal point of Samoan teachings and understanding. Suluga’s view stems from the modern role of women within the public sector. She argues that women are indeed the knowledge pots of society as they are very much involved with the day to day running of the country, our schools and our cultural traditions and practices. While this view is admirable and even desirable, it cannot negate the fact that women remain a minority within these areas.

When talking about the woman’s role in the home, many of the participant answers were the same. However, when looking at the role of women in modern Samoan society

and exploring what the ideals of success were to the Samoan woman, Peggy answered that in the past it was the woman’s role to maintain her family’s good name. Peggy also mentioned Nafanua as an appropriate example in the way that she used knowledge wisely for the good of the family. Today maintaining the family’s good name is tied up also with material assets: a big house, car, and displays of wealth.\textsuperscript{472}

There are many roles that the modern Samoan woman must fulfill. Many of these roles relate back to the traditional roles and are influenced by the woman’s role within the groups that make up the village of women. These women’s groups are the \textit{ausaluma}, \textit{faletua ma tausi}, and the wives of untitled men. However, as Olive states, with the support of the other interview participants:

The modern Samoan woman’s role in the home is to look after her family and to sort out any conflicts that arise within the \textit{āiga}. The main roles the Samoan woman has today are those of mother and wife.\textsuperscript{473}

\section*{Women and Cultural Boundaries}

While this section is a continuation from the roles and regulations that are inherent in the idea of \textit{feagaiga}, it is important to make some form of differentiation as women are faced with two roles, their cultural role and their secular role. Within the institutions and practices of Samoan culture, there is very little room, if any, for individual identity and expression. All Samoans must subscribe to the long-standing practice of communal life.\textsuperscript{474}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{472} Peggy (2008) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Wellington, New Zealand.  \\
\textsuperscript{473} Olive (2008) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.  \\
\end{flushright}
Women face many challenges; many of these challenges stem from the cultural standing of women within Samoan culture and individual interpretation of cultural norms.

When asked about cultural boundaries, Suluga has said that some boundaries or limitations exist in the Samoan culture between men and women. These boundaries include the disallowing of women from holding matali titles in some villages. In some villages the men’s council is also superior to the women’s council. In the past, culture defined the status of women in government. Today, with the introduction of equal opportunity, culture holds minimal limitations over women in government. There are still some cultural aspects where there are solid boundaries that define women in government. But, women have the same rights as men in government. Men can be cabinet ministers, and so can women. Men can be CEOs in government and private organizations, and again, so can women. One could argue that you can have theoretical rights within society but does it in practice mean that you can exercise them? Women in Samoa are free to act and exercise these rights, however, as Participant E has argued, women in Samoa are their own worst enemy. We are the ones that hinder our own progress. Many people choose to blame this on culture and the cultural boundaries that women are contending with, however, it is the legacy of Christian teachings that has contributed to this state of affairs, along with the influence of western practices, code of ethics and institutions.

Participant E argues that the relationship that is most important within the Samoan culture is the relationship between a brother and his sister. Participant E then went on to say

that the cultural boundaries we are talking of emanate from this relationship. What you can and cannot do is dictated by this relationship and the covenant or feagaiga between the two (brother and sister) that are embodied by the sister. Participant E argued that the use of the word ‘woman’ doesn’t quite fit the consideration of the Samoan relationship between brother and sister.\textsuperscript{477} What Participant E is attempting to point out is an idea that weaves throughout this thesis. Male and female roles, in the context of brother and sister (as opposed to that of husband and wife), permeate Samoan culture and society. Not only does the feagaiga influence Samoan understanding and world-view, it, in many instances, dictates the actions of both the male and female. In the context of cultural boundaries, there is a misunderstanding as to the role of the feagaiga. There tends to be a negative perspective of the feagaiga from those looking in from outside, who argue that the feagaiga indeed limits women’s roles, capabilities and influence in society. However, if the feagaiga is to be taken in context, its main function is to uphold the complementarity between the roles of females and males in Samoan culture. The feagaiga, according to Participant E, ensures that both women and men are involved in the decision making process and according to Suluga, neither one wields power or influence over the other; they are, in every sense of the word, complementary.

Peggy points out that the Samoan situation is evolving from a time when males would play the chiefly card within the workplace. However, for women this can be problematic and unpredictable, with women never knowing when a male’s ego will switch from being casual and respectful of a women as a colleague, to an instance where he says.

\textsuperscript{477} Ibid.
“I am a chief and you are not (or you are a lesser chief) and ultimately I am a male and so should be listened to”. Generally speaking, however, women try to balance the customary expectations of the *feagaiga* with job expectations. According to Peggy, if we all act respectfully of each other then much more would get done. While theoretically women should not be limited by cultural boundaries, Peggy argues that women mould their behaviour to ensure that they are not infringing on these boundaries and so as not to cause offence. However, Peggy goes on to argue against her observation of cultural boundaries saying that,

> I think women have learnt to be courteous. I think also that courtesy and professional, behaviour towards others are part of a women’s natural way of acting. Women have a different organisational style than males; women are more concerned with reconciliation than with confrontation [as they do within the cultural context of the *feagaiga*].

All three participant excerpts used above mention the importance and influence of the *feagaiga* upon the roles women take up within government departments and the private sector. As Peggy argues, theoretically women are not limited in any way, shape or form by cultural boundaries, however, women are molding their behavior to ensure that they are not infringing on the rules and boundaries that are present within the *feagaiga* so as not to cause offence and overstep their place within the greater picture that is Samoan culture. Here, Peggy insinuates that men in modern Samoa have abandoned respect for women in that they make women second class. Whether this is in response to missionary teachings or due to the evolving and sometimes ambiguous roles of women in modern Samoa is a

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question that is at the heart of this thesis. Women within the public sector have undergone a change in cultural status and a change in emphasis from that of sister to that of wife. Due to this evolution women, therefore, command a different set of rights in relation to men, power and influence within modern Samoa.

Participant E also raises the issues that have come with the adherence to the most sacred of Samoa’s relationships. She points out an interesting and important fact; that all the cultural boundaries women face today emanate from the responsibilities of both sexes to the feagaiga. From the above interview excerpts, it becomes evident that men and women alike hold the feagaiga above the ethics and regulations that go hand in hand with business, and have allowed the institutions of culture to cross over into western business practices. While this is not bad in itself, it has caused many issues to arise as to the fairness and ‘right’ of women to participate within the business sector, especially that of politics.

Suluga disagrees with this point, saying that while there are still cultural aspects where there are solid boundaries that define women in government; essentially, women have the same rights as men in government. What Suluga is alluding to here is the idea that women, much like their role in culture, choose not to participate in politics, instead, deferring the power or pule to their brothers. However, in looking at Suluga’s argument, it becomes apparent that it is not the presence of equal rights that this discussion is attempting to highlight. Instead, what is important is that no matter how we try to look at the situation, and no matter how many people acknowledge the presence of equal rights for women, limitations exist. All the participants have acknowledged that it is the presence of cultural boundaries which hinder the participation of women and limit their voice within the political and business sectors.
The above discussion raises the question of whether it is cultural boundaries that are limiting women in these contexts, or whether it is the fact that men overlook cultural boundaries within these contexts. I would argue that it is a bit of both. Women, in this context, are not only limited by Samoan culture, they are limited by their own acceptance of what this culture seems to expect of them. Culture does demand that certain aspects of female participation be adhered to; however, it appears that women, in accepting that culture is the deciding factor in participation, indeed limit themselves. However, this also raises another issue which has been paramount throughout this thesis, and that is the question of the contradictions and inconsistencies in the role of women in respect to both culture and Christianity.

**Women’s Roles within Modern Samoan Society**

We shout: Our Tautua, our Pule!
Our Service, our Power of being
Samoan, of being
Woman!\(^{479}\)

Women today participate in politics; they also participate in sports, both areas formerly dominated by men. In addition, women are leaders of government and various organizations. Today they participate actively in village councils and their voices are being heard in the Church setting.\(^{480}\)

Meafou’s opinion of the role of the modern Samoan woman is almost opposite to the progressive views espoused by Suluga. Meafou, when asked to explain the role of the modern Samoan woman, answered that a Samoan woman’s role is to care for the family, to make sure the house is in order and the children are well fed and healthy. The modern Samoan woman’s role is to keep everything organised in the family, they are also to ensure that the house is kept clean and tidy. By contrast Olive agrees with the view of Suluga saying that Samoan women are leaders, initiators and discussion makers.

Participant I talked of the modern Samoan woman’s role as more of a balancing act, saying that:

They are the backbone of society, (1) their role as mother, so they are the bearers of life and the givers of life. The fundamental role as a mother is to raise their children to be good Samoan children, so that they know their culture and language, to pass on culture, genealogy, to socialise them so that they understand their roles, passing on the knowledge in terms of behaviour and contributing to the extended family. So, they are the center or the pulse of the extended family in terms of making sure that everyone knows what is expected of them and what their rights and obligations are and (2) as a wife, supporting their husbands, in whatever capacity their husbands are operating, either in the cultural sense, or cultural politics.

Participant I also went on to point out that:

I do not believe that women operate in isolation. They’ve got to have the support of their family and extended family. Women’s biggest role in society today is the challenge of maintaining and balancing traditional practices and responsibilities with western ideas of success, so things like working and contributing financially to the family’s welfare.

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484 Ibid.
There was a report commissioned on the role and status of women within Samoan society by the Samoa Umbrella for Non-government Organisations. Within this report, article five mentions the current gender roles and stereotyping that are present in the Samoan context. The report emphasises the fact that there are numerous villages in Samoan society that currently ban females from holding any matai titles. The report states that, to date, no one has challenged these patriarchal views, whether within the cultural forum or within the courts, as this stance is clearly unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{485} The report makes mention that there are many instances where the traditionally high status and role of women within culture is transposed onto the experience of all women in Samoa. The reality for many women, however, is that their status is based on the role of their spouse.\textsuperscript{486}

Within the home, and when in the family setting, the woman’s role is to be the backbone of the family; women are the budgeters, the managers, the one who holds the family together economically, socially and spiritually. Women are the nurturers; they are the ones who go without for the good of the family.\textsuperscript{487} Other participants gave a much more literal answer to the question of a woman’s role within the home saying that the woman’s role is to take care of the children, to teach the children how to read, and assist with their homework. Women also work to earn money for the family; they are the housekeeper and the cook. Women also play the role of counselor when their children go astray. Ironing the

\textsuperscript{486} Ibid. p5
family clothes, doing the washing and budgeting for the family are also important roles that
the woman carries out.488

Today, women have become not only the ones who look after and raise the children, but are expected to contribute towards the financial status of the family. As mentioned by Lisa, a woman’s role in the family has changed and increased. Not only does she have all the usual responsibilities in the home, she often holds down a full time job.489 This view is also supported by Participant E who argues that while many women cook, are mothers, and do the general “pick-up-after others thing”, women are the “bread-winners” in a major way.490 This can be seen as a correlation of the traditional role of Samoan women, from the production of material wealth in traditional times to the provision of financial aid in modern Samoa. Where there was once was an even distribution of labour, there now seems to be many more roles, expectations and criteria that come with being a woman in modern Samoan society.

Women in Samoa’s Modern Political History

Traditional Samoan politics in the pre-Christian system was centered on the idea that authority was inherent to the mana of aspiring leaders.491 In general terms, the concept of mana is the power that is acquired from pre-Christian Samoan deities. This power is

passed down through family connections and bloodlines, however, authority and leadership in pre-Christian society was also acquired from an individual’s aptitude and talents. ^492

This idea of mana and authority sums up the traditional role of the Matai. Traditionally, the selection of family, village and district Matai was based around the core idea, understanding and appearance of their adeptness in battle, their courage, strength and mana. However, it was not only the physical, or tangible characteristics, that made these individuals stand out, but also their claims to lineage or blood ties and genealogy. Much of the inherent mana of the Matai is associated with their traceable links to ancestral power, and in some instances, the gods or atua of the Samoan people. The institution of Matai has evolved over time. However, it is imperative within the context of this thesis to reiterate the fact that selection for matai was not focused solely on males of Samoan society; women had every right to claim titles as well.

All Samoans know that they have a claim to family matai titles. Many non-Samoans think that to be a leader in Samoa, you have to be male. This is not the case. In the idea of suli, all Samoans, male or female, have the right to leadership, it is through out tautua and our obligations to the feagaiga that we find strength and gain access to leadership. ^493

The Colonial Administration of Samoa

The following section leads into the discussion of female participation within the colonial context of Samoa’s history. The Western Islands of Samoa, later known as

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^492 Ibid.
Western Samoa, were annexed and the German flag was raised at Mulini’u in February 1901. Under German supervision the two separate governments functioned in Samoa, one for Samoans and one for Europeans. Dr Wilhelm Solf, the first German Administrator in Samoa, firmly believed that the only way to effectively govern ‘backward’ peoples, as he regarded the Samoan people to be, was to foster a relationship between the Samoans and the German administration, similar to that of parent and child.

Va’ai points out that Solf’s long-term goal was to sever the Samoans from their traditional institutions and attitudes, and to destroy all Samoan political aspirations and institutions.

Early in 1919 the New Zealand government annexed the islands of Western Samoa from German administration. At the end of WW1 the League of Nations gave New Zealand the mandate to administrate the Samoan nation. This rule continued through to Samoan independence in 1962. Throughout New Zealand’s colonial rule in Samoa, the Eastern Islands of Samoa, today known as American Samoa, were and still continue to be under the protection and administration of the United States of America.

From the 1920s the call for greater Samoan participation in government began to amass a following. This next section looks at the role of women in carrying on the political protest when the males within this movement were chased into hiding and could not safely

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494 Legally changed in 1997 to Samoa
495 Mulini’u is on the Samoan peninsula and is where the seat of parliament was and remains after the separation of powers carried out by Nafanua.
497 Ibid.
499 Ibid.
protest New Zealand’s colonial rule. This saw the re-emergence of the Mau movement, which had originally come into existence during German colonial rule, but reached its peak during the New Zealand Administration of Samoa. Independence was granted to the Samoan people, however, only after a lengthy non-violent protest. Following the Second World War Samoans continued to call for independence and the right to self-government.

The Mau Movement

Near the beginning of the First World War, New Zealand quickly took control of the Samoan islands from German colonists who put up very little fight, as their focus was on Europe and the battle commencing on home soil. The Mau Movement first appeared under the German administration but it grew rapidly during the New Zealand administration. Colonel George Richardson, a New Zealand official, was sent to Samoa to carry out New Zealand policy and ensure the obedience of the native population. Richardson believed that he could destroy the Mau by official and political means, and ordered those involved in the Mau to discontinue their exploits. The Mau leaders refused to disband. Their motto Samoa mo Samoa ‘Samoa for the Samoans’ resounded from every Samoan home and their mission was the attainment of self-government. The Mau had five main arguments to their cause:

1. The system of government in Samoa was not representative

501 Ibid. p87
2. The creation and implementation of policies were carried out by government officials, and did not involve and include the Samoan people.
3. Richardson’s policies were devised with western ideas foreign to the understanding of the Samoan people.
4. The Samoan people felt that their wishes were being ignored, when it was they who were affected by the implementation of these policies; and
5. The cost of the New Zealand Administration in Samoa was far too great.\textsuperscript{502}

**The Women’s Mau**

The women’s *Mau* came about as the male leaders of the *Mau* movement were being banished from Samoa, and forced to hide in the bush. Because the men were being persecuted, the women came forward and took control of the resistance movement and did so successfully. It is significant to note that the colonial administration did not think about the women. Whether this is indicative of their own cultural assumptions about the essential powerless domesticity of women, or a reflection of the mind of military men like Richardson would be another thesis on its own. However, it is imperative to point out the lack of appreciation for the subtleties of female cultural and political power, highlighting the fact that women can step forward where appropriate means are no longer available. This was also aided by the fact that women were allowed to move freely throughout the Samoan islands.\textsuperscript{503} Not only were the women running the movement but they were also coordinating the supply and transportation of food and provisions to their husbands, brothers and sons who were hiding in the bush. The role women played led to immense pressure being placed upon the wives, sisters and mothers of those being hunted down by

\textsuperscript{502} Ibid. p89
the New Zealand administration, however, it speaks of the immense faith the male leaders of the movement put in their female counterparts.  

Olaf Nelson was one of the main leaders of the Samoan political movement. While most of the men remained hidden from the New Zealand administration and leaders of the Mau had been exiled, Filoi Samoana Taisi (Nelson’s wife) Ala Tamasese, Fa’amau Faumauina (Faumaunia’s wife) and Masiofo Paisami Tuimalaleali’ifano took over the leadership of the Mau movement, starting the period of the Woman’s Mau.

After the police raids on Vaimoso they began holding protest marches. An angry Allen [one of the New Zealand administrators] tried to discredit the movement by saying it consisted of “many old women and all known prostitutes.”

One of the reasons this movement was so successful resulted from the under-estimation of the leadership capacity of Samoan women. Western male leaders were looking at Samoa through Western eyes and hence were unable to view the complementary roles between women and men, the feagaiga in operation as seen with the women’s Mau. This does suggest that missionaries did not change everything about Samoa. Rather their influence shifted the focus and context within which Samoan women operate, however, fundamentally, their aspirations, roles and pule remained intact.

This ignorance allowed women the freedom to carry out their traditional roles, and maintain momentum within the movement. The members of the Women’s Mau faced many challenges and obstacles. If they had been as meek as the administration thought, then they

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504 Ibid.
505 Ibid. p177
would not have been able to take up the leadership and the movement would have
disintegrated. However, the women of the Mau faced soldiers with rifles, great oppression
and verbal abuse from the New Zealand administration. Allen, the New Zealand Colonial
Administrator, often spoke of the women who were involved in the Mau, in dispatches to
New Zealand, calling them prostitutes and immoral.

He said in three years the Mau had grown, a large number of men had
gathered in villages around Apia. This, he said, had led to much loosening
of morals and had attracted dissolute women. Among these women it has
been an easy task to spread the principles of lawlessness, and they now
accompany their leaders in processions, assemble at Vaimoso and annoy
the passers-by with impertinent remarks and loose behavior. 506

The women’s role within the Mau was inherent to the movement’s success. It was
the women who continued the fight when there was no one to keep fighting. It was those
women who spoke up when no one had any voice. And it was the women of Samoa who
ultimately sacrificed their own peaceful lives to continue and fight for the independence of
the Samoan people. While much of the focus is put on the male leaders of the Mau
movement women were at the heart of the success for this call to self-government and
freedom from Western administration. The role women played was acknowledged by
Nelson in a letter to his wife Rosabel:

My contribution to the cause of our little country, Samoa, is as much as
can be expected from any one man. I am quite proud of the part you have
played in the formation of the Women’s Mau and I agree with you that the
Men’s Mau might have greatly weakened if not given in altogether but for
the part played by the women under your guidance and leadership… Our
combined efforts, even though along somewhat different lines, should be
sufficient to release our children from any obligation to any further

506 Ibid. p195-196
personal service to Samoa. 507

From both the example of the Women’s Mau and from the narratives of Salamasina, the involvement of Samoan women within the political domain is very much pronounced, as well as the underlying cultural values and ideas about male and female complementarity. Samoan women have a long history of political activism and public speaking. What the reader should take from these political examples is the fact that Samoan women were very much free to voice their opinions and fight for what they believed in. Women took on a role as guardian, not only towards or for the Samoan people, but for the very culture that binds us together.

**Women in Politics**

Having looked at the role of women both within traditional and modern contexts, the following section will look at the participation and status of women in the political context. The following section will look at the history of female participation within Samoan political history. Addressing issues of equality, participation, political voice, freedom of choice and a comparison the evolution of these aspects of participation over time. Pacific women are political. We come from cultures and histories that are political. We don’t need to go to University to learn about political science. Our people make political decisions all the time, whether it is over land or titles. 508 Olive believes that the Samoan culture empowers our women to be who they are. Culture has trained and nurtured them to be strong women in order to be strong leaders. 509

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507 Ibid. p224
Participant E, when asked about the political role and status of Samoan women, and whether culture influences the role of women within the political sphere, answered that to begin with women have full participation within Samoan politics.

From my understanding of Samoan culture I see no obstacles, but I admit this is perhaps not a view shared by all. I was raised to think big, plan big and to follow what I wanted to do – you, the whole – nothing’s impossible, the sky’s the limit.\(^510\)

Peggy pointed out that it was the socialization patterns that taught women to defer to their brothers so women do not take on political leadership roles within the public domain. Nor do they ‘expect’ to do so. Women are taught that males are the decision-makers in the political sphere. This is also reinforced in the \(fa\’asamo\a\) norms of male \(matai\). This expectation also influences women’s views of women who make the decision to stand for parliament. Women often don’t support women candidates – or may accuse them of trying to act like males.\(^511\)

Article seven of the NGO Shadow report on Samoa talks of the role and status of women within Samoan public and political life. It states that:

Samoa social and customary attitudes about women’s place are the main factors influencing women and girls’ participation in political and public life. These influence public perceptions about nominating women to leadership roles.\(^512\)

How does this affect the participation and role of women within government?

While the limited suffrage Samoa practised since independence was overturned in 1991,

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there still remains the rule that only matai can run and stand for government. Although there are no rules saying that women are to be excluded from the institution of matai, it is common practice in modern society that women are overlooked and men are chosen for the role of matai. Those women that are chosen will usually pass up the role of matai saying that the role should be given to their brother. Because of this deferral, there are significantly fewer matai who are women; therefore, fewer women are eligible to run for government, which leads to fewer women within government resulting in the under-representation of women in politics. This situation is also responsible for the maintenance of the idea that women have no place in politics, as politics should be, and always has been, carried out and practised men. This idea however, was based in western thought, as it has already been argued that within Samoan culture, women are free to voice their opinion, but instead defer to their brothers to speak on their behalf. The only negative comment I have on this report is that it is taken from the view that women have always been subjugated and oppressed within Samoan society. The report talks of the increase in women participating both in business and politics, however, it makes no mention of the fact that women were very much involved in the economic and political life of traditional Samoan society. The report makes assumptions about women’s role in the past as a way of emphasizing women’s participation and role in today’s society. There is also the attitude within this report that government and the ability to make decisions are a male’s sphere of influence and expertise. 

513 Ibid.  
514 Ibid.
As a final note, the report mentions that there exists, among women, a very low self-esteem and that, amongst themselves, there is no support or collective movement that encourages women to make a stand and speak out.\textsuperscript{515} This idea of no support or collective movement nullifies the idea of women’s societal groups, that of the \textit{faletua ma tausi} and the \textit{aualuma}. It also takes away from the communal focus of Samoan society. What the report also neglects to mention is the importance and blanket effect of the \textit{feagaiga}. This relationship permeates all that is understood as Samoan life and thought.

The NGO report argues that in modern Samoa, women are utilizing their achievements through education as a method of becoming leaders within society and gaining the prestige of management positions.\textsuperscript{516} “However, women are vastly under-represented in government, in nominated decision making bodies… and in church decision-making forums.”\textsuperscript{517} Within the village setting, women are practising their rights to decision-making and leadership through the various women’s village committees and within church groups.\textsuperscript{518} However, it remains true that “in essence, women continue to be the supporters, organizers for male decision-makers and in political life the campaign managers for male candidates.”\textsuperscript{519} This status can be seen as a continuation of older Samoan ideas about the woman’s role. As a sister, it is the woman’s place to support her brother. In the political setting, this would translate as the male being out front and the women working behind the scenes ensuring smooth running campaigns, offering support to

\textsuperscript{515} Ibid. p7
\textsuperscript{516} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{517} Ibid. p6
\textsuperscript{518} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{519} Ibid. p6
her male counterpart and creating, maintaining and sustaining key relationships that spur these endeavours on. While the report does draw us back to one instance of women’s participation in Samoa of old, this is no more than lip service to what the true and full role is of women in Samoa.

While cultural boundaries have been explored through the ideas, experiences and observations of the interview participants, the United Nations shadow report has outlined some of the major cultural limitations that influence the participation, or lack thereof, of women within political life. The first of these is the priority and expectation that women will put the interests and happiness of their families first. The second of these limitations is that there is a lack of independence and finances to maintain and push women towards political life. Women are never independent of their families. Before they are married, they are subject to their family’s will, and once they are married, they are subject to the will of their spouse and his family.\(^{520}\) This aspect makes it extremely difficult for a Samoan woman to appear independent of the factors that influence her stance and views. This difficulty is only enhanced by the fourth factor listed by the shadow report that talks of the lack of support women receive from their husbands.\(^{521}\) There is also the idea that politics is a ‘dirty’ sport and should only be practised and utilized by men, and that men are able to handle the cruel nature of western politics.\(^{522}\) This is not to say that chiefly politics was not cruel, as the narratives of Nafanua and Salamasina suggest duplicity, trickery, hard choices

\(^{522}\) Ibid.
and settling for second best. This is more to illustrate the fact that, as Penelope Schoeffel argues, women are associated with the sacred aspects of Samoan life, whereas males are associated with the secular.\textsuperscript{523}

Samoan women are the conduits through which Samoans commune and converse with god. This has always been the way. We are associated more with the spiritual life of Samoans, this is where our \textit{mana} comes from.\textsuperscript{524}

\textbf{Critical Issues for Women: Legalistic Equality Vs Cultural Complementarity}

There are many issues that face women on a global scale, however, there are critical issues identified by the United Nations Shadow report on the women of Samoa. The report states quite clearly that these issues hinder the progress of women and until the nation can address these issues women will maintain their subordinate status within public life. While many reforms and policies are being brought to the fore that affect human rights and equality, there is still a long way to go, and the government must take big strides towards having legislative reform and national policies focused around the issues facing women today.\textsuperscript{525} Political participation of women, not just within Parliament, but in the election process must be encouraged. There is also the call for the inclusion of women in decision making processes, not only on the national scale, but on the local scale within families and


Another issue facing women is one that is facing women the world over, this being violence against women and children. There are also issues of equality for women in rural villages in decision making, legislation and employment. The call for equality as a human right and making education and training accessible to all women, of all ages, is crucial for a more inclusive nation and polity.

The arguments for the participation of women within both the economic and political spheres has led to many contradictions, however, these contradictions are easily explained. Women within Samoan society have one foot in two separate camps. Within the first camp (the cultural system) women hold both a sacred and economic role; indeed they are identified as the feagaiga, and are the embodiment of the covenant that holds Samoan society together. However, with the arrival of Christianity and the rise in central and popular government, women were removed from the economic life of the Samoans. Not only was their participation limited within the economic system, their secular role was made null of any influence within society. Women’s cultural role was very much diminished as the focus shifted from women’s roles as sister to that of wife. The second camp in which women were involved was the domestic sphere, which was very much encouraged upon the arrival of Christian missionaries. This aspect of Samoan culture looks at the natural and reproductive roles of women, identified in the role of Samoan woman as wife. With these two camps vying for the participation of women, many inconsistencies have arisen as women, in many instances, are made to choose between two ideals, those of

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526 Ibid.
527 Ibid.
528 Ibid.
529 Ibid.
culture, and those of the church. And so, a Samoan woman’s role changes, depending on which context you are looking at.

**The Samoan woman and her choices**

The following section will be looking at what influences, effects, limits and/or encourages the choices and opportunities that women within Samoan society may have.

From time immemorial, we Samoan women have been the peace-makers, the teachers, the healers, the makers of wealth, physical and non-physical. The ‘feagaiga’ (the covenant with our brothers) gives us all these choices: these have not been taken away from us, but I think we can be remiss in claiming and using our choices.530 The Samoan woman’s choices and options are influenced by many different factors. Nevertheless, whilst the following section outlines these factors, keep in mind that within the cultural system, women hold a much more elevated position than men.531 Olive, when asked about the traditional role of women says that their role in the family is to look after the family when the husband is not at home. She is also an advisor and someone that stands between the father and children if there is conflict. Most importantly, the Samoan woman’s role is being the mother to the children and wife to the husband.532 With this in mind, what are the choices that are available to the women of Samoa?

A majority of the interview participants held differing views when asked about the influence of culture and whether the Samoan culture defines and limits Samoan women by

531 Ibid. p20
influencing their options and choices, Suluga when asked if she believed that she is defined by the Samoan culture answered:

Of course, yes! Because it is the Samoan culture that shapes me into the kind of person I am now. The way I walk, the way I talk, and the actions I make are all representing the culture and the family I am from. I am given lots of freedom within the Samoan culture, but I am also limited to what I can do by the Samoan culture. It is a give and take relationship.  

Olive, when asked the same question, agreed with Suluga saying that yes, it defines who we are and vice versa; we also define culture.

Lemau argues that culture does not necessarily define who you are but does play a large role in this definition. Not necessarily because it is what you believe in that defines you but in the sense that a large majority, if not your whole mentality, is founded and fixed on what your culture says you are.

Participant K pointed out that nothing defines who you are as a person, however, what Samoan culture has done is provide the guidelines to what it is that makes you a good Samoan person.

The idea that culture defines who I am is true to an extent. I am Samoan, and I do what my culture says to be a good Samoa woman. Some people may think that this limits me to what I can do and achieve in my life. To assume this is to have a very closed mind. I bring so much more to the table than just my culture. I am Samoan. I am woman. I am a daughter, a wife and a sister. I am also a good Christian. These things shape me, but they do not define me.

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**Constraints and Opportunities for Women**

There are many constraints upon the choices and opportunities that Samoan women can be party to. Many are the same as women all over the world, whereas others are unique to the Pacific region and the missionary legacy that to this day affects the perception of women in Samoan society.

Many women are constrained by early marriage as they are expected to have and raise babies. Whilst Samoa does indeed have provisions for women to take maternity leave, there is not nearly enough support or encouragement from the private sector. The United Nations has said that the minimum women should be allowed off on maternity leave is 14 weeks; however, Samoa’s maximum is only eight weeks.537

Samoan women are also limited to what they can do and achieve as they are hindered by their own perception of what women are capable of, and what women can do within the present cultural boundaries that exist.538 There is a stigma within Samoan society that women are unable to succeed within the ‘job market’ and are unable to have successful careers as well as having happy and healthy families. This idea is part of the west’s legacy for Samoa. The missionaries played a part in this state of affairs, but so did the media and experiences of urban living in NZ and elsewhere.539

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For young Samoan women newly entering the job market, there is a fear that others will comment on the lowly status of her job. There is an expectation upon females that their job, whatever it may be, must reflect the cultural standing of their families. So if their parents are prominent within Samoan society and culture, then their daughter’s job must reflect that, and if it doesn’t, it brings shame upon her family.\textsuperscript{540}

Women are extremely disadvantaged within the workforce due to family commitments and expectations. Daughters and granddaughters are expected to look after their grandparents and parents. When people fall ill within the family, females are expected to drop whatever they are doing, and take care of their relatives.

My responsibility to my family, especially to my parents, is very important to me. They put the time and care into my life as I grew, it is only right that I put my time and care into them as they age. This is a way for me to show my tautua to my family. Even though I am a grown woman, there is still so much that I can learn from my parents.\textsuperscript{541}

While women do not complain, there are no exceptions within the Samoan workforce to help deal with these expectations and other commitments.\textsuperscript{542} Women are affected by the extent of their education and the time that is spent fulfilling these commitments. Because of these family commitments Samoan women usually have a low education rate. This low education is reflected in low wages and adverse working conditions experienced by women within the Samoan workforce.\textsuperscript{543}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{541} Participant L (2010) Personal Communication/Talanoa, Apia, Samoa.
\textsuperscript{542} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{543} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}

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The Change in Women’s Roles over Time

Whilst women’s roles have been discussed both in relation to pre-Christian and modern Samoa, ambiguity remains in regards to whether the role has changed for the better, or for the worse? The role of the Samoan woman has changed, but this change is not necessarily a negative thing. Many look at the loss of traditional roles and practices as a negative, however, many forget that cultures are not static and are not meant to remain the same over time. Cultures evolve as people evolve. New technologies, understandings, world-view, development and media all play a part in this evolution. Participant H, Lisa and Suluga all point out that the roles of women have widened and increased. Participant J parries this stance by saying that:

My mothers’ role, my role, the role of my sisters, aunties, grandmothers, cousins; I don’t see it as having changed much from pre-Christian Samoa to modern Samoa. At least not where it is important. They are the guardians, they are the ones that bring the families together. Women were never meant to be accessories to men in Samoan culture, they have a power and role that is specific to them. If there were opportunities, these opportunities were offered to both sexes.\textsuperscript{544}

Indeed it is these important aspects that Participant J talks of that are at the heart of this thesis and form the essence of my argument. The responsibilities of being a Samoan woman have not changed. The *mana* that is held by Samoan women, their power, prestige and inherent sense of family remains intact. Samoan women have not been robbed of their dignity, nor have they been subjected to intense discrimination due to sex, Samoan women are free, and have been for the most part of Samoan history both before and since the coming of Christianity. They make their own choices, participate in family discussion, 

village decision making and national politics. While development has brought about a change in the way women are viewed economically and politically, in the cultural sense, women remain the steadfast wells of knowledge and cultural practice that they have always been. This is supported by Participant J who states that:

> I think women have broadened their horizons so that we don't limit ourselves, and we are starting to see that there is no limitation unless we put it there ourselves.\(^{545}\)

From traditional Samoan society, to the participation of women in the Samoan economy, as teachers and facilitators, their roles within modern Samoa and politics, women have shown and continue to show the world that they are more than capable of participating and positively contributing to the development of Samoa as a nation. While there remain many obstacles women must overcome, our biggest obstacle is our own perception of what we, as Samoan women, can achieve. Over time, the role of women, as with many things in Samoan culture, has undergone an evolution due to the influence of European culture and missionary legacy. This legacy has resulted in women having to fight their way back to complementary equality. What is encouraging is the increasing participation of Samoan women within all aspects of Samoan life.

The following section is a summation of sorts, however, more importantly, it looks into the future, to the ‘light at the end of the tunnel’. While this section has raised more questions than provided answers, we must keep in mind that Samoan culture is in a state of flux, and the roles women have played, continue to play and may play in the future is heavily influenced by this state:

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\(^{545}\) Ibid.

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…all Samoans, male or female, have the right to leadership, it is through our *tautua* and our obligations to the *feagaiga* that we find strength and gain access to leadership.

The following chapter or epilogue seeks to answer the questions raised in this thesis and pose questions aimed at engaging the reader in creating and envisioning a solution to the Samoan situation. This epilogue looks to the future as possibilities and opportunities for women increase, the breaking down of barriers to women’s success and the changing perceptions of the role of women in Samoan society.

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Epilogue
What Can The Future Bring?

As an epilogue to this thesis, I would like to discuss the issues that arose in studying the ideas of gender and women’s roles in Samoa. The research of this thesis has revealed a number of inconsistencies and contradictions in respect to the roles and status of Samoan women. The epilogue will look into the existence of these inconsistencies, and the cause and the outcomes of these contradictions within wider Samoan society. These inconsistencies exist around the ideas of secular versus spiritual, cultural versus Christian and wife versus sister. This chapter will also look at the evolution of the feagaiga and the consequences of this evolution on the role of women in Samoan society. The merger of culture and Christianity will also be discussed in regards to what this means for the future of Samoan women in reference to the public sector, politics and the cultural acknowledgement of the females role in Samoa.

The fa’asamoa and the Samoan people have been incorporating Western values since the very first contact with Europeans in the eighteenth century. Change and incorporation of these values became exponential as missionaries arrived and began the conversion of the native peoples in 1830. As I have argued throughout this thesis, it is incorrect to assume that the arrival of missionaries in the Samoan islands was directly responsible for the diminished role of Samoan women. It is also extremely unjust to assume that the role of women in Samoa has been diminished, although it is also important to clarify that some sources cited do suggest this. Samoa has two versions of secular society, secular in regards to the church and secular in regards to Samoan culture. In regards to the church, secular society is any instance of every day life that does not involve or include the
church and Christianity. Secular society, in regards to culture, is the area of male dominance, things such as labour, war and fishing are examples of these. Samoa also has two versions of spiritual society, spiritual in regards to the church and spiritual in regards to the Samoa culture. Being Samoan means that you fit into these categories, which are molded to the model and function of Samoan society which can be explained in the following diagram.

**Ideas of Being Samoan**

![Diagram](image)
Within the first camp (the cultural system) women hold both a sacred and economic role; indeed they are identified as the *feagaiga*, and are the embodiment of the covenant that holds Samoan society together. However, with the arrival of Christianity and the rise in central and popular government, women were removed from the economic life of the Samoans. Not only was their participation limited within the economic system, their secular role lost any influence within society. Women’s cultural role was very much diminished as the focus shifted from women’s roles as sister to that of wife. The second camp in which women were involved was the domestic sphere, which was very much encouraged upon the arrival of Christian missionaries. This aspect of Samoan culture looks at the natural and reproductive roles of women, identified in the role of Samoan woman as wife.

With these two camps vying for the participation of women, many inconsistencies have arisen as women, in many instances, are made to choose between two ideals, those of culture, and those of the church. And so, a Samoan woman’s role changes, depending on which context you are looking at. Christianity, at the moment, bridges the gap between what is considered traditional and what is foreign to Samoan culture and ideas of what it is to be Samoan.

In traditional times, the male and female roles were clearly defined. Women dealt with things to do with being Samoan and males dealt with things that to some degree, threatened this ‘Samoan-ness’. When it came to matters such as labour, fishing and production, women carried out the ‘close to shore’ or light work required. Males ventured out past the reef and did the heavy labour, they also did most of the cooking as the cooking was done outside. Females in Samoan society maintained and carried out everything
needed for the family and home to function, males were the ones who protected this intimate unit, ensuring the ability of women to carry out their roles. For example, during battle men would go out to meet the enemy face on, and women would remain to protect both future generations and the knowledge of Samoan culture and ideas of ‘Samoan-ness’. However, as a means of illustrating the complementarity of the male and female roles, women did not remain passively at home, awaiting the return of their warriors. Some women actively participated in war. Women were given free passage between warring parties so that they could 1) tend to the wounded and 2) carry messages to the warring sides.547

From the above diagram, what we must understand is that modern Samoan roles fall into this model. Anything that fits into the realm of ‘foreign’ falls to the role of the Samoan male. Anything that is considered essential to the make-up of a Samoan falls to the women. From this explanation, we can see that women’s role in business, modern politics and the economy fits this mold as these are foreign enigmas to Samoan culture. Christianity is the one exception to this rule, and its inclusion brings with it a whole new set of rules and roles for the Samoan people. This ‘grey’ area affects every aspect of Samoan society and understanding, which also leads into a discussion on the evolution of the concept of the *feagaiga*. It seems appropriate that the conclusion to this research should indeed draw our discussion back to the traditional role of women within Samoan society. The sacred role of

Samoan women within the *feagaiga* is the permeating force that structures and influences the gender roles, even in today’s ‘developed’ and progressive societal system.

While outsiders frequently observed that Samoan gender roles seemed to oppress women, the fact remains that women were highly revered in traditional Samoan society. The question I asked at the beginning is whether the introduction of a new religion and its rapid acceptance has led to the oppression of women in modern Samoan society? In order to answer this, we must look back to the role of the *feagaiga* and how it has changed over the centuries.

As previously argued by Peggy, the *feagaiga* sets the boundaries of action between brothers and sisters, between *ausaluma* and *aumaga*, and between pastors and congregation. Respect is the main cement in these processes. Also, women defer to their brothers, while males protect their sisters; it is still a relationship of complementarity. What can be seen from this view is the idea of continuity throughout the evolution of the *feagaiga*. It has not stopped meaning one thing so that it can take on meaning something else. The idea or concept of *feagaiga* has expanded as its meaning changed. It is more important than it has ever been. So what we must acknowledge in this process of evolution is not the change, but the expansion of Samoan ideology and gender roles.

The *feagaiga*, as it has always done in the past, still encompasses every aspect of Samoan life, with the added institution of Christianity replacing older religious practices. Culturally and historically, the *feagaiga* encompasses the roles and aspirations of the

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brother and sister as argued by Schoeffel. In the historical context, the *feagaiga* regulated and acknowledged the various rights and obligations of the two family lines; those of the brother, and those of the sister. Politically and socially, the *feagaiga* encompasses the relationship between the *ualuma* and *aumaga* and between the *faletua ma tausi* and the *fono a matai*. Through the *feagaiga*, individuals were afforded protection, safety and respect. The *feagaiga* also acted to let people know where they stood within wider society, where they were from and, in large part, helped people to identify themselves both as individuals and as part of a larger community. Within Christianity, the *feagaiga* encompasses the ideals and relationship between the *faife’au* (pastor) and congregation and between the *faletua* (pastor’s wife) and *auso* (women’s church committee). Schoeffel argues that the Christianity that was spread across the Samoan islands, and indeed the Pacific, gave emphasis to the idea that a woman’s proper station in life is and was as an aid to her husband, stating that:

The term *feagaiga* now has a widely understood, secular, everyday meaning as a term for a bargain or contract and also as a more special, sacred meaning in the context of the church. Christianity removed the divine descent criterion that provided legitimacy for the exalted rank and privileges of aristocrats... and the authority of chiefs declined to secular leadership of families in village-level governments. Through the same process of ideological transformation, gender relations have changed. Separate sororal and fraternal spheres of authority and reciprocal rights and duties have little recognition today, and while the mystical powers of the *feagaiga* are less exercised by women, they have taken small steps into the previously masculine domain of secular political action.

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550 Ibid. p106
Christianity has been well supported by Samoans as part of their culture since its first introduction to Samoa. There are times when religion is practised during cultural ceremonies. The village council puts the church ministers as their main priority in everything. The mana that culturally belongs to matai has been transferred to the Christian minister/pastor. The interconnectedness of Christianity and Samoan culture is a fact that has been widely documented. Today, it is well nigh impossible for someone to say where culture ends and Christian principles and/or teachings begin although it does seem that this thesis made an attempt at making such a distinction. The Samoan people have found expression within the structure and beliefs of Christianity, a method very much akin to the practices and norms of the traditional belief system of ancient times. Family, village and district matai have become the mouthpiece and mediator, bridging the gap between the people and God. This can also be seen in the status and role of the faife‘au.

When starting this research, I truly believed that much of the inequality in gender roles was a direct result of missionary influence in the islands; however, through the readings I have encountered, I have come to the realisation that missionaries are not solely to blame. While it can be said that it was at the arrival of missionaries and their teachings that the inconsistencies and contradictions within Samoan culture began, this is indeed not the case. It is the merger of cultural ideals and Christian values that have created a ‘grey’ area within Samoan understanding. The issues we see as contradictory and inconsistent are down to the idea that Samoans now live in four worlds: secular and spiritual in regards to

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552 Ibid.
Christianity, and secular and spiritual in regards to the Samoan culture. Within each of these worlds, we must abide by different, and in many instances, contradictory rules.

Another issue to take into account when looking at the role and legacy of missionaries and their wives within the Samoan islands is the fact that many of these missionary wives ran their own ministries alongside their husbands. In their own right, missionary wives were as much a part of the mission team as were their husbands. What I have endeavoured to point out is the centrality of the feagaiga, the change in Samoan ideology and the fact that the emphasis has been taken away from the role of sister and added to that of wife. This simple transition in the minds and culture of Samoans is cause for any form of oppression or subjugation women in Samoa now experience.

Another question that was raised in this thesis was whether or not culture in fact empowers women, or whether it discourages women from economic and political participation. Following the opinions of the interview participants, many argued that women were not, in theory, discouraged by culture to participate in wider society. However, I truly believe in the opinion of Olive. Olive believes that the Samoan culture empowers our women to be who they are, that culture has trained and nurtured them to be strong women in order to be strong leaders:\(^553\)

\[\text{...while some women gain new avenues to power and increase their status, many others are becoming marginalized. Women in Apia, like}\]

elsewhere in the developing world, are more likely than men to be unemployed or underemployed.\textsuperscript{554}

Women are very much under-represented within the economic system of Samoa. Why is this an issue? There is the idea that the presence of \textit{fa’asamoa} in the economy can be either a burden or an encouragement to female participation. It can indeed be the boundary that inhibits women from participating. When a woman is seen as ‘selling goods’ there can be the interpretation that the family is poor, or that her husband/father/brother is not providing for her needs. On the other hand, women’s traditional role of catering and caring for her family, and her traditional role of economic wealth maker form the background of female participation, and her involvement in small business is merely an extension of her traditional roles.\textsuperscript{555} Outward appearance and pride are extremely important to Samoans and something as small as a neighbour thinking your daughter has a lowly job is enough to discourage women’s participation and bring shame to a family.

At this point, and before looking ahead to the future, it is important to address the complexity and in many instances confusion around the idea of change in womens role in both Samoan culture and Samoan society. Has there been any change in womens roles? There does appear, throughout this thesis, that there has been a redefinition of women as domestics whilst some symbolic roles continue to be acknowledged. Women also seem to come across as secondary to men in many areas. The many views of the participants seem

\textsuperscript{554} Cribb, Jo and Barnett, Ross (1999). 'Being Bashed: Western Samoan Women’s responses to domestic violence in Western Samoa and New Zealand.' \textit{Gender. Place and Culture.} 6(1).
to support this idea, however, as stated from the beginning there is much contradiction within Samoan society and culture. The true question then is whether women can exist and work in roles that fit into this contradiction and the answer is unresoundedly, yes they can. Perhaps these contradictions around the role of women only apply at certain levels. In the symbolic, women have a certain prestige, but at other levels they have a more constrained and limited role; within the church, politics, business – all western in origin. This idea aligns with foreign male: female and land: people division mentioned earlier. This thesis does not look to make judgement on the status of women. Have women’s roles evolved? Yes. How have they evolved? As with anything, the interaction and merger between two distinct and very strong cultures and systems of belief have caused a shift in roles that women today must negotiate in world that is rapidly changing. Whether this is an increase or decrease in women’s status may never be known and it is not my role to make this judgement. Perhaps what is needed is a realignment of some levels like business so that they align or include the female-land-family as a feature or element. Samoan society is in the process of constant recreation just as it did when Samoan leaders accepted Christianity.

What Can The Future Bring?

Eleanor Roosevelt once said that the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. In writing this thesis, I have come to the conclusion that unless we actively choose to believe in equality, whether for women, or minorities, or any instance where people are treated unfairly, equality and fairness can elude us all. Like Eleanor Roosevelt, my motivation for this research question has been to argue that equality within any society must be based on accepting and tolerating individual differences without
prejudice, malice or judgment. The following section is a mixture of my own dreams and aspirations for my own people as well as an analysis of women’s situation in Samoan society today and how this may change in the future.

In regards to there being an extreme under-representation of women serving as village and district matai, as mentioned in the Shadow report on Samoa, I do believe that this is a trend that will slowly dissipate. As education, Western influence, development and the media come into play, Samoans as a nation, will come to the realisation that as the times are changing, so too must our culture and perception of that culture. The prevailing traditional attitudes about women need to be challenged; however, there are cultural values that may be compromised if this is done to its full extent. Therefore a balance needs to be created between these significant values.

As people, we are forever attempting to increase, maintain or justify our own personal freedoms and it is only logical that the freedom of choice and participation be extended to women within the political and business life of Samoan society. The report also states that, to date, no one has challenged these patriarchal views, whether within the cultural forum or within the courts, as this stance is clearly unconstitutional.556 While outside observers to the Samoan culture may not understand this state of affairs within the Samoan nation, what people must understand is that Samoa is in a period of transition. To date, Samoan women are still attempting to balance the four aspects of Samoan life that we

all must contend with, both secular and spiritual to Samoan culture versus the secular and spiritual to Christianity. What we do therefore within the western model of justice and equality must be weighed up against the cultural perception of Samoans and the impact these actions have, not only on an individual’s home life but on cultural understanding.

I truly believe that the responsibilities of being a Samoan woman have not changed. The mana that is held by Samoan women, their power, prestige and inherent sense of family remains intact. Samoan women have not been robbed of their dignity, nor have they been subjected to intense discrimination due to sex. Samoan women are free, and have been for the most part of Samoan history both before and since the coming of Christianity. They make their own choices, participate in family discussion, village decision making and national politics. While development has brought about a change in the way women are viewed economically and politically, culturally, women remain the steadfast wells of knowledge and cultural practice that they have always been.

It has been the aim of this thesis to prove, not only to myself, but those with a background and understanding similar to my own, that we, as women, are not inferior within the Samoan culture. We do not lack political voice or motivation and our most important role in life is not solely to be a wife and mother. We are all important within Samoan society, everyone has a role to play, everyone’s voice is important. The coming of Christianity to Samoa has not stripped us of our traditional importance within society but has increased and expanded our importance and role to the function of family, village and district.
Peggy pointed out that it was the socialisation patterns that taught women to defer to their brothers so women do not take on political leadership roles within the public domain. Nor do they ‘expect’ to do so. I believe that in the future there will be an exponential rise in the numbers of women actively participating in politics and national discussion forums. With a rise in female participation, there will become a normalisation of women being active at the forefront of our society. This will not only remove any male prejudice that may exist, but will also increase the support of women candidates by women in Samoan society. I do not believe that the general view of politics will change in the near future, that it is a “dirty” vocation. I, however, think there will be an increased acceptance and espousal of the idea that women are more than capable of both participating and excelling within this field. Samoan women are also limited to what they can do and achieve as they are hindered by their own perceptions of what women are capable of, and what women can do within the present cultural boundaries that exist. There is a stigma within Samoan society that women are unable to succeed within the ‘job market’ and are unable to have successful careers as well as having happy and healthy families. This fact, however, has been disproved through the participation of so many Samoan women within the public and private life of society. And so it stands to reason, the only obstacle that is hindering women’s pathway to success, is the expectations they themselves hold. It is their perception of themselves that needs to undergo change and evolution parallel to the evolution of women’s roles throughout Samoan culture and society. While this view of female participation is quite aspirational, it is incorrect to assume that the blame lies solely with

women and their own empowerment. There are also, as discussed previously, multifactorial and various wider social structures that have brought them to this pass, such as the cultural boundaries discussed by all the participants.

There exists, among women, a very low self-esteem and that, amongst themselves there is no support or collective movement that encourages women to make a stand and speak out.\(^558\) This idea of no support or collective movement ignores the idea of women’s societal groups, that of the faletua ma tausi and the aualuma. It also takes away from the communal focus of Samoan society. While I myself am indeed an advocate of female participation in not only business but also public life, there is an innate understanding within myself that women, in order to stand up and form a collective movement, must step away from their families and put their own interests and needs in front of their family. Women are never independent of their families. Before they are married, they are subject to their family’s will, and once they are married, they are subject to the will of their spouse and his family.\(^559\) This does not mean subordinate, it simply outlines where a woman’s loyalty and tautua ‘service’ are to be given. This aspect makes it extremely difficult for a Samoan woman to appear independent of the factors that influence her stance and views. While I do not see this view of women changing much in the near future, I do believe that this view is in fact a positive aspect of the perception of women. The communal nature of Samoan life is the one constant that I believe should and will remain in Samoan culture.

This aspect of Samoan life, while appearing contradictory and a negative experience for women, is most assuredly only so when viewed with the assumption that Western individualism is the ideal model. We are nothing without our families. As espoused by Suluga, a child’s success and failure is a parent’s success and failure. With so much family pride invested in the younger generation, the success of the children, whether male or female, is of the utmost importance and urgency.

I, like so many young Samoan women today, have a dream about the role and importance of women within Samoan society. There is a popular Samoan saying that goes *sa’a fa’aotī le utu a le faimea*, ‘it is only when we investigate, question and share our opinions unreservedly that we as a people can move forward’. For years scholars have studied the migratory patterns of my ancestors, where they originated from, why they left, and how they migrated. Pacific anthropology, the social sciences, politics, history and Pacific studies have dedicated chapter upon chapter to the origins of the peoples of the Pacific. However, in understanding where we have come from, and delving into Pacific history, we seem to have lost sight of the floundering Pacific peoples of today. Our identities are slowly being normalised within western societies, they no longer are our own, but have merged to form a Pasifika identity. We are no longer simply Samoan, Tongan or Tokelauan. We have become lost within politically correct talk and media representation. For so long I have been aware, my heritage, like many, is that of a mixture. I am neither Samoan nor European; I am part of a new breed of people, numbers greatly on the rise, as cultures and people are continuously thrust together under the banner of equal opportunity. This new ‘ethnicity’ will give rise to an evolution of Samoan culture and, most importantly, in the perception of women within this society.
Our pearls and curls have been used against us and we shed them like shackles. Unadorned, savage, we stand the ground our mothers have stood before us.  

From the evolution of women’s roles, to the changing meanings of the *feagaiga*, from the arrival of Christianity to the present day, women within Samoan society play a role that is imperative to the proper function of families, villages, districts and nation as a whole. We, Samoan women, are not oppressed, we are not suppressed; we have a voice, a place and dreams.

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*Interview Participants*


Glossary

Agaga - spirit or soul
Aganu'u - culture
Aiga - family
Aitu and atua - gods and spirits
Alofa - love
Aualuma - the young woman's group, also another term for penis
Fa'aaloalo - respect
Fa'alavelave - communal events such as funerals or investitures
Fa'alupega - Samoan proverbial sayings or expressions
Fa'asamoa - the Samoan way
Fa'asinomaga - what you are entitled to – e.g. land, titles and language
Fa'afeagaiga - the covenant makers - used to refer to Church ministers
Fa'ai'ulotu - a song that wraps up the evening prayer
Fa'aulito - no mercy
Fafine - woman but also carried with it negative connotations
Faifeau - Church minister
Fale - house
Faletua - Wife of a chief or church minister
Faletua ma Tausi - Wives of titled men
Feagaiga - covenant. Also used to refer to sisters. The female, in the role of the feagaiga, is also seen as the pae or auli ‘post or iron’ as it is she that straightens, irons and smooth’s out any problems or conflicts within her family
Fono - meeting or council
Fono a matai - council of chiefs within the village
Pāpā titles - (Samoan kingship titles)
Gafa - genealogy
**Ie Toga** - fine mats

**Ifo**ga - This practice operates on the principle of non-violent confrontation and seeks to settle disputes through humility and shame as opposed to the argument of an eye for an eye. **Ifoga** is derived from the term *ifo*, meaning to bow down, humbling yourself, whether to others or to God when in the religious context.

**Ioimata** - inner cornea

**Lavalava** - clothing

**Le mafutaga a tina** - women’s fellowship”, and in the Methodist church as le auso, translated as “the sisterhood”.

**Lotu** - church or prayer

**Lotu afiafi** - evening prayers

**Mana** - inherent divine power

**Matai** - chief

Mau movement - Non-violent political protest

**Measina o Samoa** - treasures of Samoa

**Nu'u** - village

**Nu'u o tama'ita'i** - the village of women

**Nu'u of ali'i** - the village of men

**Pae or auli** - The female, in the role of the *feagaiga*, is also seen as the *pae* or *auli* ‘post or iron’ as it is she that straightens, irons and smoothes out any problems or conflicts within her family - literally means to iron or smooth out

**Papalagi** - European

**Pule** - an individual’s right to act on their own; their right to voice their opinions and their right to freedom of speech and choice, authority

**Samoa mo Samoa** - Samoa for the Samoans

**Suli** - acknowledges the idea that all Samoans, no matter who they are and where they come from, have the rights to claim lineage from two different lines.

**Sulitautua** - lineage through service

**Sulitonu** - lineage through birth
Tafa’ifā - the four kingship titles of Samoa
Tafesilafa’i - strike with courtesy
Tagaloa - the creator of creations, the all powerful male deity that brought about the creation of the world and conception of man.
Talanoa - talk
Tama’ita’i - young Samoan women
Tama-a-aiga - the sons of these royal lines,
Tamafafine - Children of the sister
Tamatane - Children of the brother
Tapa - bark cloth
Tapu - sacred
Taupou - Young village maiden, usually the daughter of a chief, who leads the young women
Tautua - service
Tinā - mother or older lady
Tupu o Samoa - Queen/King of Samoa
Ulimasoa - guide with safety
Va - space, gap or relationship
Va o tagata - refers to the relational space between people; va feiloa’i refers to the protocols of meeting
Va fealofani - refers to the brotherly and sisterly love that people should show one another
Va fealoaloa’i - the respectful space
Va tapua’i - the worshipful space.
Appendix One: Information Sheet and Consent

CULTURE, RELIGION AND WOMEN: THE SAMOAN QUESTION.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

This project is being undertaken as part of the requirements for Master of Arts in Pacific Island Studies. The major aims of this project are to delve into the issues that have arisen out of the acceptance of religion as part and parcel of the Samoan Culture. This research also seeks to look at the issues faced by Samoan women and how their cultural role has been adapted to conform to both religion and the modern day women’s rights movement.

What Type of Participants are being sought?

Anyone with any connection or understanding of Samoan Culture, Religion in Samoa and the issues facing women in Samoan society. However, this research is limited to those eligible to vote.

What will Participants be asked to do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to answer questions on the Samoan culture, the role of religion and issues facing women in Samoan society. Interview Participants are free to decline answering any questions should they wish to.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What Data or Information will be Collected and What Use will be made of it?

Data collected will consist primarily of Participants perceptions, observations and opinions on the above-mentioned topics.

This information is being collected for a Masters Thesis.
The information gained from the Participants interviews will be used within the body of the Thesis. However, all personal and confidential materials and information will be available to only myself, transcripts will be accessible only to supervisors.

The results of the project may be published and will be available in the library but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned above will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

Reasonable precautions will be taken to protect and destroy data gathered by email. However, the security of electronically transmitted information cannot be guaranteed. Caution is advised in the electronic transmission of sensitive material.

**What if Participants have any Questions?**

If you have any questions about this project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

- Malia Lameta  
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Appendix Two: Interview Questions

Culture, Religion and Women: The Samoan Question
An investigation into the absorption of organized Western religion into Samoan culture and the transposing of Women’s cultural role into Samoan public and professional life.

Culture

1. What is Samoan Culture?
2. Can you explain what Fa’alavelave are?
3. What is the role of the Matai?
4. What is aiga?
5. How important is aiga in Samoan society? Why?
6. Does Culture define who you are?
7. Can you still be Samoan if you do not practice Samoan culture?
8. What is Fa’aSamoa? Has the Fa’aSamoa changed in your view?
9. What is the Samoan concept of success?

Religion

1. What form of Religion do you practice?
2. What are religion and Christianity to you?
3. How important is religion to the Samoan person?
4. What are your views on the politics of religion?
5. What is expected of you from belonging to a Samoan congregation?
6. What is the role of your church in village politics?
7. How has religion been incorporated into Samoan society?
8. How is religion incorporated into Samoan culture?
9. How has Samoan culture influenced the practice of your religion?
10. If there was a clash between culture and religion, which would you choose to practice, and why?
11. What is the role of a religious minister?
12. What is the role of a minister who is a Matai?
13. If an individual has both religious and cultural power, are they untouchable?

- Who are they accountable to?
- How do they manage both roles?

Women in Samoan Society

Traditional Samoan society:
1. Traditionally, what was the woman’s role in society?
2. What was the woman’s role in traditional Samoan religion?
3. Traditionally, what was the woman’s role in the family?
4. Are women seen as the repositories of social and cultural knowledge?
5. What are some boundaries that exist within the Samoan culture, between men and women? And where do women stand in relation to these boundaries?

Contemporary Samoan society; Female Participants:
6. What is a Samoan women’s role in society today?
7. What is a women’s role in the family?
8. What is the Samoan concept of success?
9. What is success to the Samoan woman?
   [In place of ‘Samoan woman’ the following terms shall be used during the interview – Tama’ita’i, Fafine & Tina]

Contemporary Samoan Society; Male Participants:
10. What is a Samoan male’s role in Samoan society?
11. What is a Samoan male’s role in the family?
12. What is success to the Samoan male?
   [In place of ‘Samoan Male’ the following terms shall be used during the interview – Tamāloa, Tama & Tamā]

The Cultural Overlap

1. How does the Samoan culture limit and/or encourage women in the business and political arena?
2. What roles are usually given to women in government?
3. How are women’s views in government treated?
4. Does culture define the status of women in government? Are they limited to what they can do by cultural boundaries?