

JOURNAL OF SAMOAN STUDIES



[HOME](#)

[ABOUT JSS](#)

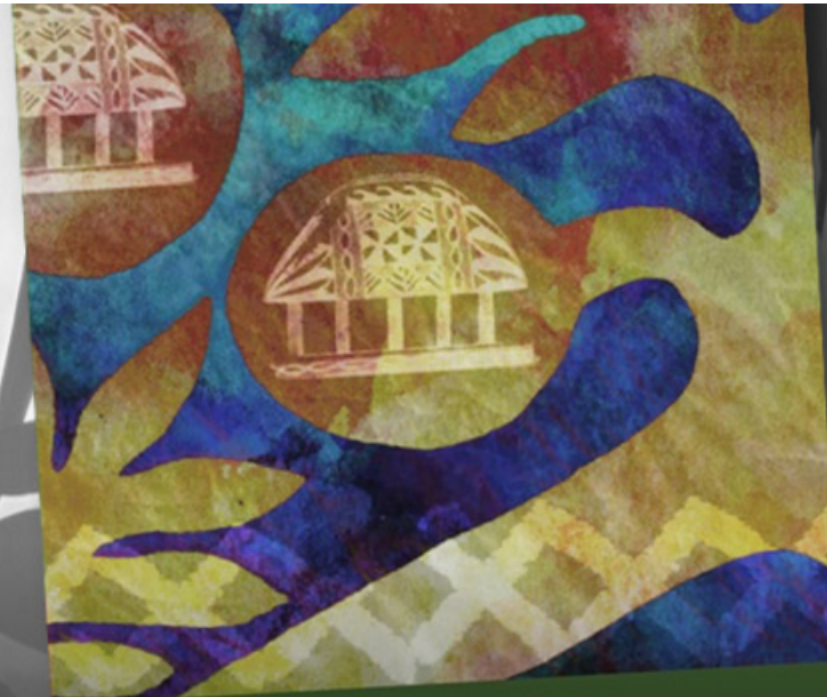
[JOURNAL ISSUES](#) ▾

[SUBMISSION DETAILS](#)

[CONTACT](#)



[Home](#) > [Journals](#) > [2017](#) > [Volume 7 No.1, 2017](#)



JOURNALS 2017

Volume 7 No.1, 2017

The Journal of Samoan Studies

Volume 7 No 1
2017

Transnational Sāmoan Chiefs: Views of the Fa'amatai (Chiefly System)

Melani Anae, Falaniko Tominiko, Vavao Fetui and Ieti Lima, *Pacific Studies, University of Auckland*

Abstract

Sāmoans make up the largest Pacific population in New Zealand,¹ the United States² and Australia.³ Family networks remain strong between diasporic Sāmoans and their homeland, and through these networks social, political and economic links are maintained. While there is increasing global concern about the 'erosion' of the fa'amatai, there is a need for more evidence of how transnational matai experience and practise fa'amatai and their roles and obligations to aiga (families) and villages in their host nations and Samoa, to better understand both the potential and risks associated with the future of the fa'amatai.

Keywords:

Introduction

This paper presents some initial findings from a three-year study still underway into matai living, born or raised outside the islands of Samoa.⁴ The study "Sāmoan transnational *matai* (titled chiefs): Ancestor god 'avatars' or merely title-holders?" is funded by the Royal Society of New Zealand's Marsden Fund. The transnational matai in our research are Sāmoan migrants and their descendants who have become *matai* while living outside Samoa. Given the Sāmoan diaspora has already outstripped the population in Samoa,⁵ in future *matai* titles are increasingly likely to be bestowed on those born and raised primarily outside Samoa. So there is a need for more information about how transnational *matai* experience and practise *fa'amatai*—their chiefly roles and obligations to 'āiga (family) and villages in their host nations and in Samoa.

Our research looks particularly at the 'affective ties' of transnational Samoa, the complex emotional and social ties between Sāmoan migrants and their communities of origin (Macpherson 1994: 83). These affective ties underpin the *fa'amatai* as a system and framework for action which defines the relationships between people economically, politically and socially (Iati 2000: 71–72). Anae's work among New Zealand-born *matai* (1998) describes *matai* affective ties as 'to be *tino malosi ma loto alofa*'—to have a strong body and a loving heart. So what are the affective ties which encourage transnational Sāmoans to take up the duties of a *matai*? Do transnational *matai*, especially those born in western metropolises, maintain meaningful and sustainable ties to families and villages in Samoa? How is transnational life transforming the way they 'do' *fa'amatai*? And what are the challenges and possibilities for the persistence of the *fa'amatai* outside Samoa?

Literature

Fa'amatai is the chiefly system of Samoa, and is central to the organisation of Sāmoan society. It is the traditional indigenous form of governance in both American Samoa and the independent State of Samoa. Of central importance in the system are the *matai*, the holders of family chief titles. *Fa'amatai* is the key socio-political system of governance and way of life in Sāmoan culture. Inherent in the *fa'amatai* is the welfare and well-being of the extended family and the protection of family property, consisting most importantly of customary land. In the 49-seat parliament of independent Samoa, all 47 Members of Parliament must be *matai*, performing dual roles as chiefs and modern politicians, with the exception of the two seats reserved for non-Sāmoans. The *fa'amatai* is significant in modern Samoa where most of the land, about 81 percent (567,000 acres), is under

customary ownership with the rest under the national government as public lands. Over the last 200 years, the *fa'amatai* has been greatly impacted upon by colonialism, Christianity and capitalism (Macpherson and Macpherson 2009) and more recently by the burgeoning transnational communities of Sāmoans abroad. Transnational *matai* are those chiefs who have been conferred with titles while they have been domiciled abroad. They consist of men, women, and those born in Samoa and overseas. They may speak Sāmoan or not, they do not attend village fono regularly, but all are part of large Sāmoan families who may span several continents and who all serve their families to varying degrees.

Much of the literature on transnational *matai* is polarised. Critics point to the perception that transnational *matai* demand authority and respect yet they have not acquired the 'tools of the trade' to earn them the right to exercise that authority or deserve the respect of their peers in Samoa (So'o 2008). They are seen as lacking the "cultural grooming to become 'proper' *matai* who know their stuff—oratory language, genealogy and esoteric matters, and many subtle nuances associated with *fa'amatai*" (So'o 2007: 254). Opening the ranks to transnational *matai* is also seen as eroding the homogeneity of traditional family and village *matai* by introducing better educated youth and new social agendas on gender, sexual orientation and political philosophy (Macpherson and Macpherson 2009: 191). Advocates of traditional *fa'amatai* argue that for Sāmoans to confront and manage globalising forces without a sense of historical disjunction, cultural foundations must remain intact (ibid: 57).

However, advocates of transnational *fa'amatai* see it as leadership intent on attaining and maintaining peace and harmony for aiga (families) and for Samoa in changing times. At the same time as they are becoming socio-economically and politically successful outside Samoa, they reinforce their commitments to extended family and village, thus reproducing the social relations that ensure the reproduction of *fa'amatai* (Gough 2006: 39; 2009).

There is a clear need to move beyond these oppositions and to conceptualise *fa'amatai* from a transnational stance, which recognises the experiences and narratives of transnational *matai* and their children born on foreign soil. Lee states: "Any issues facing Pacific peoples must be discussed in the context of both the islands and their diasporas, taking the processes of 'world enlargement' and transnationalism into account" (2007: 1). This is especially important given the implication that transnational *matai*, especially those born outside Samoa, are not considered real and viable networks of exchange or connection (Gershon 2012, 2007; Gough 2006, 2009). Anae's previous research on Sāmoan transnational *matai* and *fa'amatai* in New Zealand (1998, 2002, 2006), has shown overseas-born *matai* to be 'real' Sāmoans, to be thinkers and makers of cultural discourse and thus critical for the persistence of the *fa'amatai*.

Approach

For this research we are drawing on interviews with 24 transnational *matai*, including women, living in three centres of the Sāmoan diaspora—Sydney, Australia, and in the United States in Hawaii and Oceanside, San Diego. Many of the first generation of Sāmoan migrants to New Zealand in the 1950s then moved to Australia in the 1970s in search of better work opportunities, taking advantage of the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement. Steady Sāmoan movement to North America via American Samoa and Hawaii since 1951 was enabled by granting American Sāmoans the status of US Nationals

and free entry to the USA, but fewer rights than American citizens. Access has also occurred through membership in the Mormon Church (Lee 2007: 1).

This paper focuses on the eight *matai* in Hawaii, including two women, and sketches themes from a first round of interviews in mid-2015. The *matai* included retirees, professionals, blue-collar workers, housewives, and one in the military. Four were pioneer generation aged 64 to 94, and the others born or raised primarily in Hawaii were aged between 38 and 54. The interviews took place in Honolulu in English and Sāmoan.

All became *matai* while living overseas. Their titles were bestowed by villages in Samoa or American Samoa. In the pioneer generation, two *matai* held *ali'i* (sacred chiefly) titles, one held a *tulāfale* (chiefly orator) title, and one held two *ali'i* titles from different villages. Among the younger cohort raised or born in Hawaii, one *matai* held an *ali'i* title, two held *tulāfale* titles, and one held an *ali'i* title and a *tulāfale* title from the same village. This last *matai* did not attend *saofa'i* (title bestowal ceremonies) in Samoa but had them conferred through '*Tapa le ipu*'—where a title is bestowed in absentia with a family member in Samoa acting as *matai* proxy.

Key Themes

Several themes have emerged from the preliminary analysis of the Hawaii interviews.

Knowledge of Fa'amatai

Reasons for accepting their titles were varied but all had a strong sense of the many years of service they had given to village, family and Sāmoan communities in Hawaii and Samoa. For some accepting was straight forward. One felt his titles recognised his *tautua* (service) to his village and government. Another spoke of not wanting a title but accepted it recognised her "strong life of service". Another had been told "one day it would happen" by his father, and accepted the title on his death despite believing Sāmoans overseas should not become *matai*;

My mum, my family and my wife wanted me to ... because I am that person who fights for the fa'asāmoa and family stuff ... and church fa'alavelave⁶...Secondly, I know my family wanted me desperately because of my job... to help doing family fa'alavelave.

He liked the "excitement" of *fa'asāmoa* and saw it as a blessing from God. His military service gave him confidence to be a "respected leader and *matai*". Several participants had resisted a title but acquiesced in the end. One had not wanted the financial demands of being a *matai*. Another "didn't much care for it", but eventually accepted after the 2009 tsunami devastated Samoa and his *aiga* desperately needed help. One turned down offers twice from his wife's family because he never saw himself as a *matai*, preferring "to work at the *ūmu*⁷ at the back". But he accepted the third time despite feeling "not worthy for it";

To this very day I still don't understand much about it, I try! ... I'm thankful for it, it has its perks but if I had a chance to give it back I would ... now I tell my wife, basically, I'll hold my turf until one of my boys is ready and then I'll give it to him.

Another was told by his father that education was more important in their new country and *fa'amatai* was a "waste of time". But his love for his mother meant *fa'amatai* had become important to him because "it was so important" to her:

I didn't think about the gravity, wisdom, significance, importance of fa'asāmoa because I had no context at all [as a young man]...but I knew I was there, to honour my mother ... now I feel the weight of responsibility, I'm ready for it.

It was his mother who taught him about his *gafa* (genealogy) and *fa'asāmoa* shortly after leaving college. He accepted his title two years after her death.

The men gave the following explanations of learning about *fa'amatai*:

- As youth, they didn't know anything about *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai*. All they knew about was the work—the *ūmu* (cooking), killing the pig, and other *fe'au* (chores).
- First real education was serving a *matai*—their father:
... it's when you serve that you learn, [you] can't learn by just talking.
- Service was defined as 'being a good son'; watching and learning:
... Then I realise that being a good matai's taking care of your family so they're happy! My dad never kept anything! He always gave it ... Whenever he need something they always came! 'Cause they know, e alofa ... My dad...he only had a sixth grade education but he was a tagata alofa⁸...and that made all the difference.
- *Matai* overseas must *tautua mamao* (provide service from afar)—to give and lead however you can so that when you return to Samoa you are loved.
- Need to understand about the two systems of *fa'asāmoa* and democracy:
If we combine those two...the fa'asāmoa will continue to grow.... we have to be smart and when we get the matai title...then people will respect us...both go together.

The female *matai* gave the following explanations:

- The key is understanding the “path of the *matai*”, including the language and respect.
... what's most important is the attitude of the matai, and his speech, no matter how high they are. But if they come and they are disrespectful? No ...
- Ethics are important.
- Being responsible but open to advice.

Overall, there are strong themes of *tautua* (service) and *fa'aāloālo* (respect) combined with the feeling of responsibility for the wellbeing of aiga and, for some, the “heavy weight of it all”. Understanding the *fa'amatai* has been a lifetime process of accretion, with parents in particular setting the foundation “layer by layer”, rather than through any moments of epiphany.

Tautua and Fa'alavelave

There were few marked differences in views and experiences of *tautua* (service) and *fa'alavelave*⁹ between pioneer *matai* and younger ones raised in Hawaii. *Tautua* was seen as the most important requirement of a transnational *matai*.

For the pioneer generation, *tautua* in Hawaii embraced a range of community and church activities, including:

- Organising Flag Days and other anniversary celebrations;

- Setting up cultural/language programmes and radio and TV programmes;
- Raising donations and help for villages in Samoa; and
- Hosting Sāmoan official delegations.

After running through her extensive list, one pioneer *matai* added, “Whatever I have to give out, even to this day I’m still doing it.” Other experiences of *tautua* in Hawaii and Samoa were shared by pioneer and younger generations:

- *Monotaga*—traditional contributions to the village or to family social obligations.
- Financial and cultural responsibilities during weddings, funerals, ‘Church things’.
- Support for ‘*āiga*—mainly financial in Hawaii, Samoa and elsewhere.

Showing respect for elders was also cited as important by the younger *matai*. Apart from one who taught Sāmoan at university and ran a small *aoga* (preschool), the Hawaii-born or raised *matai* tended to focus their *tautua* around the church. Lack of confidence with the language was an important factor. Lack of extended family in Hawaii was also cited a reason for “less and less involvement from my part as being a *matai* in my family”. The main time that *matai*’s title was “active” in Hawaii, he said, was when attending his wife’s *fa’alavelave*. However, another young *matai* felt the responsibilities of *tautua* had made him “stronger physically and mentally”, in particular imbuing a “good, strong feeling that enabled me to stand in front of people”.

Support for family and villages in Samoa and elsewhere was an important part of *tautua* for all the *matai*. One younger *matai* said he always contributed to a *mogotaga* or other village donations “because of my chief title...I can’t avoid it” and recognised he always had to be “prepared and equipped” for that.

A pioneer *matai* said he and his wife still “serve our families” in Samoa:

Such as yesterday, her sister called for a money ... we sent her 300 to help her and church fa’alavelaves. Even though the air fares are expensive we still want to travel to Samoa for fa’alavelave.

Another pioneer had always helped his village and family in Samoa. He had brothers and sisters there to “take care of things” and one brother “represents” him:

When he’s there I’m there. He communicates exactly, so he knows what’s happening on the ground and what is needed, and he’s much more, much more knowledgeable, than I am.

Trust was one of the challenges of *tautua* at a distance from the village. Distrust and language difficulties underpinned misgivings among many Hawaii-born and raised *matai* about taking part in *fa’alavelave*. One said relatives in the islands were always asking for money and were not honest about what it was spent on:

It got to the point where you’re avoiding the phone calls ... I told my daughters whenever you see the 684 don’t answer it. They just have to draw the line.

Excessive demands for *fa’alavelave* were being fuelled by excessive spending in the islands, he said, citing funerals costing tens of thousands of dollars with hundreds of fine mats.

It really makes you think...is this the fa’asāmoa? What has changed? A lot. So having a matai comes with a lot of responsibility.

But another younger *matai* felt “chiefs that were brought up here” tended to complain about *fa'alavelave* as a “burden” because they did not understand what it was about:

I tell them, no... by giving and helping others when needed, then in return they'll give and help when a fa'alavelave happens with them... I don't think of fa'alavelave as an obligation but a way or opportunity of fellowship with family and friends—like the fa'asāmoa, we all work together so then the work load is easier and lighter.

Despite the misgivings, *tautua* was valued by all the *matai*. One younger *matai* described being able to serve as the “best part” of Sāmoan culture. One of the pioneer *matai* agreed but lamented that “money carries more weight” than actual physical service.

Personally I'd rather have the service because it's more deeper. You can build your 'āiga with that, you can't build it with money.

Inter-generational Challenges

The loss of knowledge of *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* was identified as the most important challenge by both pioneer and younger *matai*. In particular, incompetency in *tautala fa'asāmoa*, Sāmoan language, was seen as the biggest problem for *matai* raised or born in Hawaii. One pioneer *matai* felt “kids are hesitant” because they did not know the correct “respectful language” required by *matai* when speaking and by others when talking to them. A younger *matai* admitted he hesitated over becoming a *matai* because of the injunction to “educate your mouth first before becoming a chief, not get a chief title and not understand anything or know how to talk like a chief and then that would bring disgrace to any family”.

Some younger *matai* enrolled in Sāmoan language classes. Others gained confidence from speaking at church, learning from elders and at family *fa'alavelave*, especially at *si'i*:¹⁰

I try to read and read so then I can understand the proverbs and how to use them or when to use them ... so if I understand them really well then I'll be able to use them confidently with clarity.

Another younger *matai* confessed that “not knowing the meaning of what needs to be said and why” held him back on occasions when he should be speaking as a *matai*. He memorised from books but knew he lacked understanding of the context:

My uncle tries to help me a lot. He'd make me do the faafetais¹¹ ...like the closings, but as far as laugas¹² ... there can be up to seven parts, I'm like ...no way.... If I did this more I would be much better matai and be recognized out there in the community...

Some pioneer *matai* taught Sāmoan language classes, including at university and in prisons. One younger *matai* had set up a small preschool. The need to teach Sāmoan language from pre-school age to university level was stressed by several *matai*, as was the need for parents to “force” their children to speak Sāmoan. One pioneer *matai* said she always spoke Sāmoan at meetings regardless of whether anyone understood, just to give the children the opportunity of “hearing the Sāmoan language”.

Allied to the language shortcomings was the lack of knowledge about the *fa'amatai* because of the absence of village meetings in Hawaii. One pioneer *matai* said children learned about the *fa'amatai* “from observing, on top of service” and classes were a poor substitute.

Another repercussion of the loss of understanding about Sāmoan culture was the perception that *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* were just about *fa'alavelave* and giving money. A pioneer *matai* noted “the kids now say being a *matai* brings hardship”.

One younger *matai* agreed:

It stops and makes them turn their back to our fa'asāmoa. This is caused by our own families....if they do not explain properly to them where they are giving it...how much they're giving.

As a result, he said, younger generations were choosing faapalagi—or European style—weddings because “they do not want their families to be suffered by cultural stuff”.

One trend identified by some participants is for transnational *matai* and women *matai* to be increasingly given *ali'i* (sacred) titles rather than *tulāfale* (speaking) titles. One younger *tulāfale* explained how it worked out for two contemporaries after they all received their titles together:

The other two, even though they know the fa'asāmoa, they're not that strong with the āganu'u which is why they were given the high chief titles.

As a result, of the three he is the one asked to speak for the family and is also the representative for his pastor and church.

When it comes to sharing opinions and ideas the two young chiefs would hardly say something because their fa'asāmoa is weak. So a lot of times it's always myself and the other high chiefs that would make the decisions.

For their part, the female *matai* suggested perhaps there is a perception that women needed to be protected from potential political conflicts as *tulāfale*; or, that it was just another expression of the *fa'amatai* being perceived as the domain of men.

Transformations

Some different forms of *fa'amatai* in Hawaii have emerged from the interviews.

Atoa Ali'i

A unique development of the *fa'amatai* in Hawaii is the *Atoa Ali'i*, formed in the early years of Sāmoan settlement there and whose members act in similar ways to village *matai* in Samoa. Initially the council was instrumental in organising annual flag days, hosting visiting Sāmoan groups, and working with social agencies to help with Sāmoan youth. Some of those ceremonial functions have continued:

If there are any special guests such as the government or the governor of American Sāmoa then a kava ceremony would be held specially for and to greet them. The high chiefs and the orators of our country are still trying to uphold and carry on the culture and traditions in our own country.

The *Atoa Ali'i* has monthly meetings, a structure, and rules for serving its *matai*, as one senior member put it, “in heaps and heaps of ways”:

Such as celebrating independence....we all have to put in money... to run the flag celebration.... if someone of our members passed away...we all have to put in 500 or even up to 1000 if we all agree to it.

But the *Atoa Ali'i's* prominence has faded in later years amid disagreements among members and with other *matai*. One source of contention has been the acceptance of government money to run flag days. One pioneer *matai* refuses to attend because “they all about the money”. A younger *matai* felt the arguments “make Sāmoans look bad in Hawaii”:

... It went from flag day being the biggest Sāmoan thing in Hawaii ... to where, you'd be lucky you see a hundred people...

Questions also surround the *Atoa Ali'i* bestowing some *matai* titles on members. The relevant village in Samoa is informed, according to a senior member, but the title “cannot be register[ed] there ... it is registered under the *Atoa Ali'i* here in Hawaii”. *Matai* in Samoa do not recognise these titles, so some *matai* with *Atoa Ali'i* titles cannot stand to *faatau* (give an accounting of their contribution) among *matai* in Samoa or elsewhere. However, one *Atoa Ali'i* member stated that had not been his experience for events like funerals:

...the Atoa Ali'i has to put in and agree to all go to Samoa to take the sii¹³...it doesn't matter if they question whether the Atoa Ali'i are registered matais...automatically they will accept us and give us ietogas.¹⁴

The Church

The significance of the Church to *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* in Hawaii was very clear, as summed up by one pioneer *matai*:

For countries overseas there are no villages, so the church is the village.

All participants had “grown up in the Church” and expressed great respect for it. Four attended the EFKS¹⁵ and the rest were members of either the Latter-day Saints, Catholic or United churches. As substitute villages, the churches were seen by the pioneer generation as the “the backbone” for maintaining the *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* and passing them on to younger generations. There was a symbiotic relationship between *matai* and ministers (*faifeau*) of the various denominations, as described by one pioneer *matai*:

I always use them for major events ...to do the church service for the [visiting Sāmoan] prime minister ... flag day ... but other things, they need my help ... in the community...

However, the younger *matai* had concerns about the churches' role. They acknowledged that in the absence of village councils or family strong in *fa'amatai*, the churches were “the primary school where you'll be educated and advised ... how to speak formally”. But one of the big problems if they did speak at church was being criticised publicly for their lack of Sāmoan language and knowledge of the *fa'asāmoa*. Misgivings were also expressed about the influence churches wielded over *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* in Hawaii and the lack of coherence with practices in Samoa. In Samoa, one younger *matai* noted, when someone died, all the *matai* of that village would get together to support the family:

That's the real fa'asāmoa ...but here it's a different story...the matais give their help under the church...they only chip in if it's a church member who passed away...because only the church runs the fa'asāmoa...

Another young *matai* was frustrated at the erosion of *fa'amatai* in the Church:

The villages as well as the chiefs don't really have a say anymore because priorities are firstly given to the leaders of denominations ...they act as if they're chiefs in the village.

However, one *matai* found a way to balance the competing demands, taking advantage of twice-yearly church visits to Samoa to also “help out in any way when there are family obligations.”

Women Matai

The two female *matai*, both of the pioneer generation and strong in their *fa'amatai*, expressed strong views about difficulties being recognised as ‘real’ *matai*.¹⁶

I got it in terms of ability. I know there are other men who look at me and think why am I the one chosen when I am a woman? But to me it's because the elders have faith in me.

The main obstacles were from male *matai* who were “ignorant” about why female *matai* existed, and from those who did not believe female *matai* should exist at all. Living in Hawaii has provided ways to challenge such attitudes that would perhaps be unavailable in Samoa. The younger of the two women spoke about a female *tulāfale* who wanted to speak at a wedding but was told to sit down by the Master of Ceremonies:

He said that there is no such thing as women matai ... when I found out about that, I was not very happy ... I did the Sāmoan programme on the radio ... I said to him for your information, don't you ever, you and the other men who are all listening, think lowly of mothers and women. The women were the first tafaifa¹⁷ ... The man was shocked. So I told him if I ever hear again that you or any male says another thing to the women matais then you watch what is going to happen ... then the telephone was buzzing ... then he got fined at his village.

Participants considered both women had been chosen to be *matai* because they were leaders with strong and sustained records of service to 'āiga and communities in Hawaii and Samoa. The elder woman was acknowledged for her promotion of Sāmoan language and customs, summed up by one younger *matai* as “the greatest Sāmoan teacher here, I love her”.

A pioneer *matai* said opponents of female *matai* would do well to remember Salamasina,¹⁸ “one of the greatest traditional leaders in Pacific history” whose era marked “a moment of peace [and] the flowering of our race in voyaging and building fale and all of the art forms and the medicine”.

The Future of Fa'amatai

Most participants believed the *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* would survive in Hawaii, despite the challenges and obstacles, because “we are the *fa'asāmoa*... that's part of who we are”. One younger *matai* felt it would survive but “require much more to maintain it ... financially”:

... It's getting more and more expensive... and it's gonna get worse... [but] I don't think it will go away... we are the fa'asāmoa... while the process changes, the pillars of identity don't change.

But a few were more pessimistic. One younger *matai* described the *fa'asāmoa* in Hawaii as “tottering on the edge” because people want to be “more *fia tagata*”¹⁹:

It's all about bring this, bring that 'cause I'm the matai...the respect has gone.

One pioneer *matai* suggested *fa'asāmoa* would not last in Hawaii because “it's the American life” there and “after the old generation is gone, the children will not have anyone to listen to”.

To help the *fa'amatai* in Hawaii to “endure for a long time in a very good way”, one pioneer *matai* suggested changing the way *matai* were chosen. 'āiga should define the qualities needed to be a good ali'i or tufale, then identify a young person and “shape and mould” them for the role. It was pointless, he said “conferring to somebody in his eighties and then you know five years later...it's all over”:

And also I really feel it should be the best Sāmoan not the best male Sāmoan ... the need is for wisdom Gender is irrelevant.

Another theme for pioneer *matai* was that the *fa'amatai* could not be separated from duties to Samoa. It was essential to maintain Samoa as the “sacred place”, the spiritual source that would sustain *fa'asāmoa* “wherever we go and no matter how many generations we move”.

Among the younger *matai*, there was more emphasis on the need to respect elders in the ‘āiga and church—“the relationship or the gap between you and people who are older than you is important”. Also to know that despite hardships—the constant demands on money, time and services, this was the path of a chief. Most participants felt giving was central to maintaining *fa’amatai* overseas and “if you don’t give, then you won’t get blessings... *matai i fafo* need to realise this.”

Criticism of *matai* outside Samoa for eroding *fa’asāmoa* and not practising ‘real’ *fa’amatai* drew differing responses. One pioneer *matai* observed wryly he had seen “more erosion in Sāmoa than I saw outside of Sāmoa ... so I see more integrity trying to preserve our *fa’asāmoa* away.” One younger *matai* recounted how overhearing criticism from *matai* in Sāmoa made him “shake and my uncle just tells me to cool down”. He put it down to them being “jealous because we were able to sustain the culture outside of Sāmoa”:

They don’t think our village can sustain, I guess, the way they do things there ... I can for sure a hundred percent say it’s a lie! Because of our church ... been doing fa’asāmoa for how long [and] we got a lot of little kids... so I know in our church , our village, the Sāmoan language ... the Sāmoan culture will always be strong.

And moreover, he added, his younger children had “the *fa’asāmoa* app—so I just tell ‘em hey, keep it up, it’ll come to you don’t worry.”

The best way forward agreed by all participants was to teach younger generations born in Hawaii about Sāmoan *āganu’u* (customs) and language, and that would be good for the future of the *fa’amatai*. One pioneer *matai* suggested young overseas *matai* or *matai*-in-waiting could be sent back to Sāmoa “to do the village life, to learn”. In Hawaii, it was important to teach Sāmoan language, culture and “traditional way of life” in the churches and from preschool through to university. If all those institutions were “stronger ...then there’s a big possibility our culture and the *fa’amatai* will survive”. But ultimately, the future of the *fa’amatai* in Hawaii was up to all Sāmoans:

We are the ones who have to continue wherever you may go ... the father and mother, elderly, faifeau, community leaders ... teaching the language and to make important the culture, especially the matai system ...to implement the power of the matai, that’s the power of the matai [to] develop your family.

As one pioneer *matai* summed up, “The title only has meaning if the family is together...otherwise it’s an empty symbol”.

Conclusions

“There’s no way of getting rid of it, it’s who we are. We have to die in order to get rid of it.” (pioneer matai)

Despite changes over the last hundred years, *fa’amatai* is still being reproduced out of Sāmoa. As pointed out by So’o (2007: 253) the versions of *fa’amatai* that are practised overseas are variants of the *fa’amatai* that is practised in Sāmoa. And so they should be; culture changes. There is debate about where to find the ‘true’ *fa’amatai*. But does a ‘true’ version exist? Some say the *fa’asāmoa* and *fa’amatai* in Sāmoa are more corrupt than in Australia or the US. They see the ‘real’ Sāmoa happening out of Sāmoa—mainly because transnational *matai* hold on to the *fa’asāmoa* and *fa’amatai* that their parents taught them as pioneers (See Anae 1998). Practices often referred to as transnational Sāmoan cultural and fiscal “excessiveness” (ibid. 255) have now infiltrated the homeland and been accepted as the norm.

This research suggests that affective ties are becoming stronger for younger generations born and raised outside Sāmoa; stronger because of rather than despite the loss of language and knowledge of customs and *gafa* (genealogy). These emotional, spiritual and social ties wrap around the changing elements of the *fa'amatai* to hold them together. They have been expressed in this research as:

- respect for elders and the sacrifices they have made to be Sāmoan in a foreign land;
- a desire to take on *matai* titles out of respect for parents, 'āiga and villages and to work for their wellbeing;
- acknowledgement of inequalities associated with rank, status and system of authority in the *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai*;
- and, a strong emotional attachment to the *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* as a way of life, despite the challenges and misgivings identified in this paper.

Understanding the perspectives and experiences of transnational *matai* gives a temporal perspective on how the *fa'amatai* is changing. In independent Sāmoa, Tcherkézoff (2005) finds possible challenges to *fa'amatai* in the debates about suffrage and in new religious movements that emphasize individualism. Research on Sāmoan migrant communities in New Zealand (Anae 1998, 2002, 2006), Australia (Va'a 2001) and California (Gershon 2012) indicates that *fa'amatai* takes new forms to stay relevant for life in Sāmoa i fafo.²⁰ For the pioneer generation, traditional *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* had to take a back seat to the demands of settling in a new home, establishing their churches and raising local-born children. Now those new generations are grappling with issues of social justice, culture, language and identity by rebuilding what they know of *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai*, limited as it might be, because they are affected by the values such as service and respect learned from their pioneer parents (Anae 1998; 2002; 2006).

In New Zealand, the affective ties are what inspires younger generations born out of Sāmoa to demand from their elders and from the government the setting up of re-education/new education programmes where they can be taught Sāmoan culture, history, language and identities in the *aoga amata* (language nests), schools, Universities and other tertiary institutions (see Anae 1998, 2002, 2006). It is also affective ties which inspire New Zealand born Sāmoans to take on *matai* titles. These trajectories may well occur in the other nodes of Australia, Hawaii and mainland USA. Time will tell.

Despite changes over the last hundred years, *fa'amatai* is still being reproduced out of Sāmoa. Understanding the perspectives and experiences of transnational *matai* gives a temporal perspective on how the *fa'amatai* is changing. In migrant communities as expressed by *matai* in Hawaii, the Sāmoan church pastors assume prominent leadership roles. Other serious challenges to the reproduction of *fa'amatai* are expressed above—especially the increased use of English. Many young people do not know the honorific language, the pan-Sāmoan ranking of titles, and the appropriate speeches that are necessary to conduct a ceremony or a sophisticated debate in a *fono o matai*. They do not have the oratory skills that are necessary for performing *fa'amatai*. Then there are the pressures for giving—money, time, service. However, with the leadership of the pioneer generations, first and second-born generation NZ/Aus/US-born generations are finding ways to meet these challenges. Strategies developed amongst pioneer cohorts and NZ-born Sāmoans in New Zealand are leading the vanguard in the persistence of *fa'asāmoa* and *fa'amatai* in Sāmoa i fafo.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank the Marsden Fund, Royal Society of New Zealand for their assistance, without which we would not have been able to conduct our research. We also wish to thank our research participants who kindly agreed to be interviewed by the team, and Pacific Studies, Te Wānanga o Waipapa, University of Auckland for supporting this research project; and Karen Mangnall for editing the first draft of this paper.

Notes

1. Demographics of New Zealand's Pacific Population 2006 Census. See http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progressdemography/population-growth.aspx; See also Anae 2006. 'Sāmoans' in *Settler and Migrant Peoples of New Zealand*. Albany: David Bateman Ltd, pp. 230-235. Published with the assistance of the Ministry for Culture and Heritage Te Manatu Taonga, pp. 230-235. See also http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/samoans_
2. Ahlburg, D. and Y.N. Song. 2006. Changes in the economic fortunes of Pacific Islanders in the USA in the 1990s. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 47 (1):111.
3. Lee, H. 2007. 'Introduction'. In *Migration and Transnationalism: Pacific Perspectives*. Lee, H. and S.T. Francis (eds.) 2007. Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press, p. 11. Note that Sāmoans will be the largest group only if Indo-Fijians are not defined as 'Pacific' in the Australian Census. This is the case in the New Zealand Census.
4. In this paper, Sāmoa encompasses both the independent (former Western) Sāmoa and American Sāmoa.
5. Sāmoans living in Sāmoa in 2006 were estimated at 188,000. The majority of ethnic Sāmoans now reside in other countries, primarily in the United States (180,000 in 2012), New Zealand (115,000 in 2001) and Australia (55,843 in 2011).
https://www.google.co.nz/?gws_rd=ssl#q=Samoan+population+in+Samoa+
6. A hindrance, an impediment; term applied to events like a funeral, wedding, graduation where the extended family gather together to help financially.
7. Earth oven
8. Person with a loving heart
9. Family obligations like a funeral, wedding, graduation or any occasion when the extended family gather to help in terms of service, time and financially.
10. ritual giving of gifts such as fine mats
11. Thank yous or acknowledgements
12. Oratory
13. Ritual giving of fine mats, gifts, money
14. Fine mats – exchanged during ritual ceremonies
15. Ekalesia Fa'apopotoga Kerisiano Sāmoa (also CCCS – Congregational Christian Church of Sāmoa)
16. Negative experiences of female *matai* are reiterated in the literature (So'o 2007) where women *matai* have become the 'target for discontent' (ibid.:83) of their male counterparts.
17. Holder of the four paramount titles of Sāmoa
18. Salamasina, Queen of Sāmoa was the first to hold the four (royal) titles. Holder of these four paramount titles together give full royal status
19. Arrogant
20. outside Sāmoa

References

- Ahlburg, D. and Y.N. Song. 2006. "Changes in the economic fortunes of Pacific Islanders in the USA in the 1990s." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 47 (1):111.
- Anae, M. 2006. "Sāmoans in Settler and Migrant Peoples of New Zealand." Pp. 230–235 Albany: David Bateman Ltd. <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/samoans>.
- Anae, M. 2004. "From Kava to Coffee: The 'Browning' of Auckland." In *Almighty Auckland*, eds. I. Carter, S. Mathewman and D. Craig. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Anae, M. 2001. "The New Vikings of the Sunrise: New Zealand-borns in the Information Age." Pp. 101–121 in *Tangata o te Moana Nui: The Evolving Identities of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa, New Zealand*, eds. C. Macpherson, P. Spoonley and M. Anae. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Anae, M. 2002. "Papalagi Redefined: Towards a NZ-born Sāmoan Identity." Pp. 150–169 in *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*, ed. P. Spickard. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.
- Anae, M., 1998. Fofoaivaoese: The Identity Journeys of NZ-born Sāmoans. Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Auckland: University of Auckland.
- Demographics of New Zealand's Pacific Population 2006 Census. http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progress-demography/population-growth.aspx.
- Gershon, I. 2007. "Viewing Diasporas from the Pacific: What Pacific Ethnographies Offer Pacific Diaspora Studies." *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 19, No. 2: 474-502.
- Gershon, I. 2012 *No family is an Island*. USA: Cornell University Press.
- Gough, D. C. 2006. "Mobility, Tradition and Adaptation: Sāmoa's Comparative Advantage in the Global Market Place." *Graduate Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 4:1 (2006), 31-43.
- Gough, D. C., 2009. "Cultural Transformation and Modernity: A Sāmoan Case Study." Unpublished PhD Thesis, New South Wales: University of Wollongong.
- Iati, I., 2000. 'The Good Governance Agenda for Civil Society: Implications for the fa'a Sāmoa'. Pp. 67–77 in *Governance in Sāmoa: Pulega i Sāmoa*, eds E. Huffer and A. So'o. Canberra: Asia Pacific Press and Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Lee, H. 2007. "Introduction." In *Migration and Transnationalism: Pacific Perspectives*, eds. H. Lee and S.T. Francis. Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press.
- Tcherkezoff, S. 2005. "Culture, Nation, Society: Secondary Change and Fundamental Transformations in Western Sāmoa. Towards a Model for the Study of Cultural Dynamics." Pp. 245–301 in *The Changing South Pacific*, eds. S. Tcherkézoff and F. Douaire-Marsaudon. Suva: University of the South Pacific Press.
- Macpherson, C. 1994. "Changing Patterns of Commitment to Island Homelands: A Case Study of Western Sāmoa." *Pacific Studies*, September 17(3):83–116.
- Macpherson, C. and L. Macpherson, 2009. *The Warm Winds of Change: Globalisation in Contemporary Sāmoa*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- So'o, A., 2008. *Democracy and Custom in Sāmoa: An Uneasy Alliance*. Suva: IPS Publications, University of the South Pacific;
- So'o, A., 2007. *Changes in the Matai System: O Suiga i le Fa'amatai*. Apia: National University of Sāmoa.